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*G.P. Putnam's Sons*



# The Gathering of the Forces





THE  
WORLD



# THE GATHERING OF THE FORCES

BY

## WALT WHITMAN

EDITORIALS, ESSAYS, LITERARY AND DRAMATIC REVIEWS  
AND OTHER MATERIAL WRITTEN BY WALT WHITMAN  
AS EDITOR OF THE BROOKLYN DAILY EAGLE IN  
1846 AND 1847

EDITED BY

CLEVELAND RODGERS AND JOHN BLACK

WITH A FOREWORD AND A SKETCH OF WHITMAN'S LIFE AND WORK  
DURING TWO UNKNOWN YEARS

IN TWO VOLUMES  
VOLUME TWO

*ILLUSTRATIONS IN PHOTOGRAVURE*

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS  
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**Part IV**  
**POLITICS**



## POLITICAL CONTROVERSIES

April 6, 1847

[WHITMAN GIVES HIS POLITICAL RECORD]

THE Brooklyn *Advertiser* has thought proper, for some time past, to intimate through its columns that we have been a Whig: and yesterday (5th) it published the following article:

### POLITICS OF THE EDITOR OF THE *EAGLE*

Since the editor of the *Eagle* has commenced the way of asking questions we would just like to know *what* the said editor was in politics in the summer of 1841? Tell now candidly Mr. W. W.! Report *has* said that you were a Whig; and if we are wrong in believing pretty fair *proofs* of that report, why we would like to know it and will *then* do you justice. And while he is about it let the editor tell us whether he did not *bitterly oppose* the first nomination of Silas Wright. So much for the past; when that is *answered* we will come down to a later period.

Well: if it is a matter of such intense curiosity to the *Advertiser* to be enlightened on a

WALT WHITMAN

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subject in which the highly flattered personage now inditing this article supposed no living mortal took interest enough to cross the street for the purpose of finding out, "Mr. W. W." will at once devote thereto all reasonable pains and space. The "summer" consists, (we will be *very* specific, in order to give the utmost possible satisfaction), according to the calendar legally established in this part of the world, of the months of June, July and August; thus the "summer of 1841" comprises the 29th day of July, 1841. Now on the said 29th day of July, the aroused Democracy of the counties of New York, Kings, and Richmond, met in one of the mightiest mass meetings (*the New Era* report said 15,000) then ever known—for it was feared that Mr. President Tyler, whose advent had just been made, would ratify the charter of the Whig national bank, in process of incubation among the Whig Congressmen; and the rallying cry of prospective "repeal" was sent forth, by all true American Democrats. Among the officers of this meeting, from Kings County were H. P. Waring, Wm. Burbank, S. E. Johnson, and others:—

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## POLITICAL CONTROVERSIES

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and from New York such men as Isaac Varian, Edward H. Nicoll, J. W. Edmonds, W. Bowne, C. P. White, old Christian Bergh, Stephen Allen, and so forth. And strange to say the very personage, who, according to the *Advertiser*, was "a Whig" in the "summer of 1841," was introduced by the chairman, and made divers remarks, among others the following—which are Whiggish, are they?

*From the New Era, July 30th, 1841:*

After touching upon various points of Democratic doctrine and policy, Mr. W. [Whitman] concluded as follows: Meetings have been held by our people in various sections, to nominate a candidate for the next Presidency. My fellow citizens: let this be an after-thought. I beseech you to entertain a nobler and more elevated idea of our aim and struggles as a party than to suppose that we are striving to elevate this man or that man to power. We are battling for great principles—for mighty and glorious truths. I would scorn to exert even my humble efforts for the best Democratic candidate that ever was nominated, in himself alone. It is our creed—our doctrine; not a man or set of men, that we seek to build up. Let us attend then, in the meantime, to measures, policy and doctrine, and leave to future consideration the selection of the agent to carry our plans into effect. My firm conviction is that the next Democratic candidate,

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## WALT WHITMAN

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whoever he may be, will be carried into power on the wings of a mighty re-action. The guardian spirit, the good genius who has attended us ever since the days of Jefferson, has not now forsaken us. I can almost fancy myself able to pierce the darkness of the future and behold her looking down upon us, with those benignant smiles she wore in 1828, '32, and '36. Again will she hover over us, encouraging us amid the smoke and din of the battle, and leading us to our wonted victory, through "the sober second thoughts of the people."

So much for our being a Whig in '41. As to our ever having opposed the nomination of Silas Wright, it happens that we were one of the instruments in the latter part of July '44, of first making his nomination, through a Democratic daily, published in New York City: and this, in defiance of the then design of the "leaders" that Mr. Bouck should be renominated. Silas Wright's name was kept flying at the head of a paper we edited; and many a hard foughten struggle had we to keep it there, till the meeting of the Syracuse Convention.

—Most of the squibs of the *Advertiser* toward us, are simply impertinent; and we disdain even to crush such pitiful malevolence.

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## POLITICAL CONTROVERSIES

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But it may be as well to crush *this* three-times-repeated charge—an utter and unmitigated fabrication, deliberately woven out of no atom or shred of foundation—to the “proof” of which we challenge our shameless neighbor, and wanting which we brand it, once for all, as the wicked utterer of falsehoods. If there be any meaning in its promised “justice,” we demand now that it must “know” its insinuations false, that it publish the foregoing “proof,” and own its error.

*November 5, 1847*

[A DEFENSE OF WHITMAN'S GRAMMAR]

THE Brooklyn *Star* takes us to task because of our “weakness,” and the *Advertiser* because we don’t write correct grammar. We shall have the frogs finding fault with the voices of canary birds, at this rate.

Would’st thou behold a newspaper which is the incarnation of nervelessness? the mere dry bones of a paper, with all the marrow long withered up?—Behold that paper in our venerable contemporary of the *Evening Star!*

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## WALT WHITMAN

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Conducted for years by one of the worthiest, best-hearted, most respected, and now of the most venerable citizens—we mean that veteran editor and excellent man, Colonel Spooner\*—the *Star* was an interesting weekly budget of news, well digested, and making a readable family companion. But heaven bless us! it is fallen now into the sere and yellow leaf, (for a new era in the press has long since passed) and it must soon die of inanimation. It is of the olden time—respectable enough perhaps;—but, great powers! for a paper like that to talk of “weakness.” Why, one little drop more of “weakness” in its already full cup of that article, and it would have to get somebody’s assistance before it could even lean against the wall and die!

We now come to the other offence, writing bad grammar. This charge is made by the Brooklyn *Advertiser*, of all papers in the world! (And we must here advise those of our readers who do not get the *Advertiser*, that this charge is by far the least of a long series of pertina-

[\*As a boy Whitman worked for Colonel Alden Spooner, as an apprentice at typesetting on the *Star*. See “Specimen Days.”]

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## POLITICAL CONTROVERSIES

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cious impudence which that print has thought proper to engage in of late toward us.) . . . Some two or three personages, fresh from the regions of English cockneydom, migrate to America and set themselves up—*they* forsooth—to edit an American newspaper, and send forth their dicta on the great topics which affect our country and its citizens! These fellows, (with such a determined hatred of the eighth letter of the alphabet, that they never, in any event, allow it to pass their lips,) these fellows, sodden in their ignorance, with nothing so characteristic about them as a vanity of triple brass—these low, untaught, and most absurd cockneys—with elongated ears, the most diluted sort of mental thinness, and literary vision compared to which moles' eyes are yawning caverns—*these* fellows, forsooth, set *themselves* up, in a large and intelligent American city, as the heads of what should be an arbiter of taste, a discusser of the profound principles of government, and an adviser of republican freemen in the most important relations of life! Are the Whig Party of such an intellectual city as ours so pushed

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## WALT WHITMAN

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for advocates as all this? Have they to go through the “lowest depth” of mental and decorous qualities, into a “lower deep” still—and import from English cockneydom the means of managing an American press—that (or what ought to be that,) proud and noble engine? Are the Whigs of Brooklyn not ashamed of themselves for the supremely ridiculous aspect which the ignorance of these men makes identical with their cause? Is it possible that the members of that faction—which claims to have so much of refinement, and of decorous observance—see such a daily martyrdom of our language, and such a determined impalement of good sense, as mark the *Advertiser*—and do not wish for a better time a coming?

But the conducting of a paper here, by these persons who are really unacquainted with American institutions, and of course unfitted to assist in developing them, is also an insult to the rest of the citizens, of all parties. Their paper is not a decent one.—It frequently publishes the most obscene stories and allusions—and, by its infamous prying into domes-

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## POLITICAL CONTROVERSIES

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tic affairs, creates distress of a poignant nature in the sacred privacy of families. The whole concern, with the pack of English cockneys at its head, should be hooted from the island! . . . So much for the character and deservings of this bad and contemptible paper. We have but one word more—and that is on a point which we sha'n't deign to touch again:

What our style and “grammar” are, the readers of our columns can see for themselves. As to the style, we simply endeavor to be clearly understood: as to our “grammar,” it is of course perfectly correct, or we shouldn’t presume to write for an intelligent community. We say so plumply, because we consider the very least requisite of an editor is not to violate philological truth. We never sacrifice at the shrine of formal construction, however; and it is well known that a numbskull with a grammar *book* in his hand, but not the least idea of the general philosophy of the science in his head, can pick flaws in any idiomatic sentence, and parade his stupidity by calling incorrect what is frequently the best merit of the composition. We say that any goose, with just

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as much real knowledge of grammar as the calf-skin has that binds it, can pick such flaws —in which fact is the palpable explanation why the *Advertiser* has charged what it has.

*April 16, 1847*

[STARK DEMOCRACY'S DESTRUCTIVENESS]

THE drift of yesterday's *Evening Star*'s leading editorial, in rejoinder to some remarks of this print the day before, lies in the assertion that the Brooklyn *Eagle* feels a "dreadful disappointment in regard to party profits," and is covered with sorrow because (having lost the Brooklyn election) it is not to cut any slices for itself of the political fat which rewards success. Moreover, the *Star* knows how one feels, better than one knows himself —and persists that our serenity was not serenity after all, but only a "painful spasmodic effort." It then addresses us in the following prodigious manner:

*Eagle!* soar above the low and foetid purlieus of profligate partyism! Mere party is but a poor and discreditable dependence. Leave your croaking buzzard

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## POLITICAL CONTROVERSIES

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over the way to the vile offals and garbage of party! Let *thy* ends, like ours, bethy country's and truth's! Corruption wins not more than honesty. The patriotism which we have ever cherished, and which breathes in our columns, and which determined our happy political issues on Tuesday last, may confer—even on thee,—respectability and honor! Partisan patronage is humbugious: its promises were, what it once was, mighty; but its performance was, what it now is, nothing. The restlessness of stark Democracy may, in thine eyes, constitute its beauty: so restlessness is the beauty of the sea, which renders it a sorry foundation whereon to build. But what sayest thou of this restless Democracy's indeterminateness and unquestionable destructiveness? Are these also beautiful?

Yes: to us the “destructiveness” of Democracy is very beautiful; because, without it, all the accumulated tyranny and the hoary abuses and abominations of the past would continue. “Indeterminateness” is no part of Democracy—which has the definite, (though its vast comprehensiveness makes it vague enough to some minds), “end and aim” of rooting out all that interferes with man’s native-born and rational freedom, at the same time guarding every *right* of the individual—his “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” In this long and weary struggle, as in

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WALT WHITMAN

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the progress of the winds, there come many counter-currents; but they are trivial—while the flow of the great purpose itself wends on forever, as long as human hearts throb to good desires and to hopes for truth and Christianity.

But perhaps our contemporary, in the method of the above extract, means to be waggish, (excuse us if this be an error). And as we can't lose all the fun, even if our side didn't win last Tuesday, we take the liberty, in all good nature of responding in like strain.

. . . *Star!* go wash they venerable eyes, that thou mayest see how the world has not been sleeping for these fifty years! Mere precedent is nothing, and will oftener warrant wrong than right. Thou "aged and respectable" Whig! wilt thou forever turn up thy time-honored nose at all which smacks of alteration and reform? For goodness' sake, thrust not thy small clothes, queue, and powder, before every body's eyes, as the non-pareil of human genius! Inspirit thy dry bones forthwith, or the young world will leave thee in its race far behind, and thy querulous

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## POLITICAL CONTROVERSIES

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voice will vibrate only to the ears which belong to the same "establishment." Thou may'st be a nice young gentleman enough for a very limited circle met to imbibe a decoction of the Chinese herb, but in certain matters thou surely art not elevated to an equal height with fine particles of the tobacco plant!

*August 8, 1846*

[WHITMAN WOULD BANISH THE WORD  
"FOREIGNERS"]

Now, gentle reader, tell us truly, heard'st thou ever a bit of more scurrilous insanity (take it at random,) than the Whig organ parades, in its yesterday's number, about our good *Eagle*, as follows: "It was the poor man's friend, but only last week it hoisted its flag in glorification of a measure that will compel thousands of men who now earn good wages to winter in the poor house." Likewise, "it," meaning our good *Eagle* again, "taunts those who are not born on the soil, with being foreigners, Britishers, cockneys, etc., and headed an article on Wednesday thus:

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## WALT WHITMAN

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‘A Word To Our Native Friends.’ Good bye, neighbor.” . . . The *Advertiser* has too much paucity of brains to know it—and therefore we will tell it—that the first extract above, involves a grosser insult to our American workingmen, than could be crowded, by any other words, into a similar space! Send our sturdy citizens to the “poor house,” quotha—because the government will not dole out a bounty to them! Can ribald impudence go farther? . . . We think the people of Brooklyn, (and elsewhere too,) must be pretty well satisfied by this time, that the splutter of “ruin” in consequence of the new Tariff, is the merest vagary in the world. But enough on this point.

With respect to the course of our *Eagle* about “foreigners,” (a word we never, of our own option, use in these or any column—a word we would banish from the press of this country, if we could,) we laugh to scorn the puny wrigglings of the *Advertiser* to make capital out of the way we think proper now and then to excoriate *it*. For the *Advertiser* to identify itself with any of the European na-

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## POLITICAL CONTROVERSIES

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tions, is unfair even to the wickeder phases of those nations' character; and as to its identifying itself with *this America—that* would be a scandal at which justice, common decency, and our Yankee fame, alike revolt! . . . Only one bit more; (for the word-mire of yesterday's *Advertiser* we again disdain a rejoinder). Are we to understand by that frightful sentence, "Good bye, neighbor," that the Whig organ is about to take itself off? Is it going back to England?

September 2, 1847

### OUR VENERABLE CONTEMPORARY OF THE *Star*

COMES down upon us yesterday in an article headed "The *Eagle* Never Stops to Catch Flies,"—which assertion is sufficiently disproved by the fact that we *have* caught it. The *Star* seems to think it demolishes us skin and bone by calling us "country schoolmaster." We are rather pleased with the title, if given sincerely: a proper schoolmaster is one who is an honor and a benefit to his race—and many

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## WALT WHITMAN

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a more famous man don't do half as much good.—Our ancient neighbor also talks of the “true scurrility” of our character as a schoolmaster; by which we are to suppose, not only that teachers are generally scurrilous persons, but that there is also such a thing as false scurrility. . . . Our venerable friend then propels in this wise, after magnanimously declining to draw our portrait:

This hectoring scrivener had better keep himself behind his smoky paragraphs, which regularly throw his Democratic friends into convulsions, and which have already done vast service to the Whig cause. We would not for the world unseat him!

Which is very kind indeed, considering how easily you could do it, *Mr. Star*. Moreover “hectoring scrivener” is good; but it ain’t so good as “smoky paragraphs.”

The *Star* rejoices that it is “able to amuse.” All we have to say, then, is that it has cause for exceeding great joy: a more ridiculous paper is not printed in Yankeedom. We should not volunteer this opinion; but being provoked, and having a judgment drawn from us, we may as well state the fact.

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## POLITICAL CONTROVERSIES

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The *Star* copied our local reports, and being gently reminded thereof thought fit to give us some of its impudence. Having thus, sharply exposed its meanness, instead of confessing its error, it now comes to abuse us personally—which is all the thanks we get, after supplying it with the most valuable portion of its local reading! Naughty *Star*, is this your decorum and dignity?

*July 12, 1847*

### WE HAVE PROVED THE *Advertiser*

EFFECTUALLY and undeniably an inventor of falsehoods, on many occasions; and the chastisement it has had to take at our hands has at one or two periods appeared to do it good. But the wisest of men has said of the class to which our neighbor belongs, that though one should pound them "in a mortar, among wheat, with a pestle," yet will not their nature be rubbed out of them; (in other words, they will continue to be the self-same ancient coin, of a value equal to twenty-five cents plus six and a quarter; which is certes a very favor-

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## WALT WHITMAN

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able allowance of the value of the *Advertiser*). . . . With respect to the matter lately at issue between us, the Whig print has not condescended at all to answer the facts, dates, and cases we have given—except by an ungrammatical and silly string of lines that about as thoroughly show up our contemporary as its worst enemy could wish. It consists of such like arguments as “the editor of the *Eagle* being a descendant of the flathead Indians.” In reply to that, we are utterly dumb!

*February 5, 1847*

### MORE TERRIBLE TRACTORATION!

THE *Advertiser*— which is always poking its stupid nose in by-ways—has grubbed up the astounding and horrific fact that the workmen at the Navy Yard in this city are *not* paid in “shin-plaster” paper money (at a loss of from one to six cents on every dollar,) but *are* paid in the real rino, British sovereigns, “which the government rates at \$4.81½, but which the men get only \$4.80 for”!! that is, (even allowing the *Advertiser* to be able to tell the truth,

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## POLITICAL CONTROVERSIES

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which is allowing a great deal,) the horribly outraged workmen lose the frightful amount of about three-fifths of a cent on a dollar! This is surely the greatest exposure of governmental horrors, yet! When one comes to reflect too, that if the workmen keep these golden things a year or two, (for time of sickness, or need), said golden things will be *so* much more likely to depreciate *so* much lower than the immortal rag money, the startling depravity of the Navy Yard treasurer is placed in a most vivid light!

*July 6, 1847*

### MORE OF THE *Advertiser's* LOGIC

OUR Whig contemporary, on Saturday last, comes down in the following withering manner again:

"It is well known that the editor of the *Eagle* is an Indian."

This is quite unapproachable and unanswerable. As to the long farrago about our part in the relief movement, we will attend to it tomorrow.

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## WALT WHITMAN

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*November 5, 1847*

As a specimen of the excruciating wit of the Brooklyn *Advertiser*, witness the following from yesterday's number of that paper:

TO BE LET.—The upper story of the editor of the *Eagle*. No foreigner need apply.

Now the "upper story" of the *Advertiser* establishment, (*i. e.*, the fourth floor), being kept for pugilistic encounters, between the editors of that print and persons who come to make complaints, of course is not likely to be sought after. For, according to the system which those who follow the ring pursue, a newspaper office *must* have a separate "story" into which, when the editor is called upon to settle any disputed point, he may invite the caller, and the said point be decided by an appeal to fisticuffs. Faugh!

*February 7, 1847*

The ridiculous little *Advertiser* charges us with the high and mighty crime of *not* despising the British tariff or British gold. Truly we cotton to both; the one evidences judg-

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## POLITICAL CONTROVERSIES

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ment—and we prefer the other to the notes of any paper bank in the world. But we have an aversion to British ignorance, impertinence, and cockneyism; ergo we don't like the idiotic little *Advertiser*.

*January 18, 1847*

### EGOTISM

THE Brooklyn *Advertiser* had several editorials, the other day, highly laudatory of the merits of geese.

*February 5, 1847*

### MORE EGOTISM

YESTERDAY'S *Advertiser* has half a column treating on pigs.

*January 18, 1847*

The *Advertiser* boasts that it can see farther into the doings of the "Brooklyn loco-focos"\*\* than any body else. If the length of our neigh-

[\*Loco-foco was the current appellation for Democratic-Republican Party.]

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## WALT WHITMAN

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bor's vision bears any analogy to the length of its ears, we would confidently trust it to prophesy the events of the next fifteen centuries.

*January 15, 1847*

Goethe avers that after all the happiest persons are the brainless ones—those who never think. If this is so, we are sure the Brooklyn *Advertiser*'s existence must be a perfect heaven upon earth!

*January 15, 1847*

### NEW READING, BUT THE SAME MEANING

IT is quite impossible to make a silk purse out of the Brooklyn *Advertiser*.

*October 28, 1846*

"Undertake to help" the *Advertiser* mountain "to bring forth *that* mouse," quotha, Sir Whig organ? Yes sir! Only tell us *which* mouse—for, by'r ink-stand! you have so extensive a progeny in that line, it were well to get a word more definite!

## TWO LOCAL POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

[WHITMAN is here revealed as a political partisan, desperately contending with the local Whigs in two elections, in both of which he lost. His philosophy in defeat is as interesting as his pre-election exhortations to the faithful to come out and vote for the right ticket. The two elections are followed from the beginning of the campaigns to the counting of the ballots and the afterthoughts of Whitman in contemplating defeat. The election of November, 1847, is not included here, since the larger issues of slavery had then come to the fore and his editorials on that subject are all grouped under "The Extension of Slavery."]

*September 28, 1846*

### CLAIMS OF THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY AT THE NEXT ELECTION

THE whole course pursued by Silas Wright (for we suppose as a matter of course he will

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## WALT WHITMAN

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be nominated at the Gubernatorial convention)—the acknowledged endorsement of him and his acts by the Democracy of the State—the decided stand taken on the subject in the Democratic State Convention now in session at Albany—all join in settling the fact that *the Democratic ticket at the ensuing election in this State, is the ticket whose success will involve the principles of economy in the government, of rigid caution in outlays, of prompt payment of State dues, of a high-toned sustaining of credit, of no borrowing of money, or lending it to special purposes.* These assumptions are justified by facts which any man can see for himself. The well known repugnance of Governor Wright to run the State in debt for any thing, is one fact. He is almost the only man we have ever had for Governor, who was not willing to swim with a temporary and local wish for an “improvement”—even at the expense of saddling it directly or indirectly on the people. We need such a man most especially at this time; for at this time, we take it, we are as a State going through the change, (never, we hope to return to the old plan again, when once out of it)

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## TWO LOCAL POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

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from identifying the State's money and security with local speculations—to a stern holding aloof from such things, and an exclusive application of the people's funds to *State* expenses.

The Democratic Party, then, come before the people, at the present time, as the party of economy, of debt-paying, and no debt-contracting for the future. As an offset to those principles, the Whigs are known to be (so, from their very nature, indeed) the friends of "liberal" outlays, ready to assist with the public money sectional speculations, and in favor not only of manufacturing "plenty of money," but of lending the people's credit to corporations and companies. . . . The State will have the two sets of principles arrayed before it, like dishes at a feast.—We shall soon see which they will choose.

*October 23, 1846*

### PREPARATION

ON the first page of our paper today will be found an article on the subject of organization, in reference to the coming election. We partic-

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## WALT WHITMAN

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ularly enjoin our friends hereabouts not to be so sanguine of victory, as to neglect the usual precautions that assure it. We should never be found sleeping, lest the enemy come upon us, *while* we sleep. We think that Kings County—once draw the votes out—is thoroughly Democratic; but it wants the vote *fully* out. The Whigs run us hard—and we must not flag in our efforts previous to the battle. We have, by all odds, a better personal County ticket than the Whigs—and ought to draw forth more spirit and enthusiasm than they. Look, for instance, at our candidate for the Sheriffalty. Who will pretend to say, there is a fitter, more deservedly liked man in the County for that station? We must be allowed to add that the gentlemen on the Whig County ticket, don't "begin" to hold an equal place in public esteem with ours.

*October 28, 1846*

\$100 REWARD

STRAYED, lost, stolen, or *hidden*, all the principles, aims, objects and intentions of the

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## TWO LOCAL POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

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Whig candidate to the Gubernatorial office, to be voted for at the election next Tuesday. As it is of the utmost importance to know *something more* about the said candidate, (the little which is already known being any thing in the world, except favorable) the above reward is offered to any body who will bring irrefragable specimens of said candidate's principles. The reward, (in the usual way,) to be paid upon "conviction."

November 2, 1846

### SOME LAST WORDS

A parting word ere the battle is joined. If there was a time when the Democratic Party could enter heartily and zealously into a political contest, it is NOW! They have not only the most important *political reforms* to incite them, but the dignity and efficiency of the *civil institutions* of the State are at stake. The party which has heretofore deluded the electors by a pretended attachment to LAW AND ORDER, is openly in the field, with a candidate whose hope and success mainly depend

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## WALT WHITMAN

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upon his supposed sympathy with a spirit of social disorganization and rebellion against the laws of the State which has already resulted in *murder*—which has called for the intervention of military force—and which after casting an indelible stigma upon our fair fame, is eagerly watching its opportunity of mischief under cover of a *more friendly alliance* than the present administration of the State!

It is vain to attempt to deceive the people by false pretenses. The fact blazes like the hand writing on the wall that *John Young was chosen in the place of Millard Fillmore, in order to make friends with that "mammon of unrighteousness," the law-defiance of the anti-rent districts.*

The course of Silas Wright upon this dangerous subject—his prudence and firmness in vindicating the laws, and in arresting the progress of the pestilence, are well known. If this energy and constancy in duty are to subject him to reproach and downfall, farewell public gratitude!

We wish the minds of the people of Kings County to be turned upon *this issue*, and *this alone*, in determining their votes upon the executive candidates. This, like Aaron's rod,

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## TWO LOCAL POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

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swallows up all the rest. The *magnanimous* Whig Party in this State is offering as its grand champion and expositor, a man, who, whatever may be his undeclared views, was adopted as their candidate because it was certain that he would propitiate the most violent faction which has disgraced the State since laws were heard of in this hemisphere—a faction which assumed the exterior (without emulating the justice) of Indians, shot down the officers and defied the government of the State, till superior force brought it to a *temporary* submission. Let the people of the State themselves judge whether these Indians shall again raise their fiendish cries, their fires blaze forth anew, and the blood of legal functionaries again be shed. They have only tomorrow to determine, and we hope the violence of “party spirit” will not mislead them from judging correctly.

*November 2, 1846*

### CLOSE UP YOUR RANKS!

Now, Democrats of Kings County! now, close up your ranks and prepare for the con-

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## WALT WHITMAN

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test. Let each individual define his share of the duty of his part, and then see that no part of it is left unfulfilled. In the disarray of parties, individual action will count, in this election, more than on any former occasion. There seldom has been an opportunity afforded in which the ardent, devoted, true man of the party could effect more by personal exertion than now. The young Democrats who have struggled for years in the cause of reform, who have realized every hope, and whose attachment to the great and good man at the head of our ticket has been testified by former sacrifices and by ardent devotion, have now the opportunity, the glorious and long desired occasion, of crowning him with a noble triumph. Let Democrats but act up to the generous impulse that inspires them, and they will will the most substantial of victories. Let but each individual who is true to the cause be alive to the magnitude of the occasion, and success is beyond every contingency. No matter what Treason has devised and is about to carry into execution; no matter what a

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## TWO LOCAL POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

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profligate coalition may threaten; no matter what corruption and intrigue may effect—*IF THE TRUE MEN OF THE PARTY, if these be faithful and unflinching, and be awake to the occasion, be ready for exertions commensurate with it, there will be no danger of the result!*

*November 2, 1846*

### **FEAR AVAUNT!**

IF we have any drowsy despondent men in our ranks, we tell them to shake off their despondency. Victory is ours if we but will it. All we have to do, is to see that every Democrat deposits his ballot, and all is safe. A full vote secures our victory. New York State will, most undoubtedly retain the post of honor she has so long enjoyed under Democratic rule. Democrats, to retain our position, however, we must not slumber. If we must sleep, do so after the laurels are won. The judgment of the people of this State is made up.

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## WALT WHITMAN

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*November 2, 1846*

### ACTION

THERE is no time for delay. Only one day will elapse before the election. Every Democrat should make preparations for it a matter of personal concern. Our opponents are preparing actively, laboriously, constantly, and thoroughly. Let Democrats emulate the zeal of their adversaries, in this respect. Remember Pennsylvania has been lost SOLELY through apathy and neglect. Let no proper measure be omitted by the Democrats of Brooklyn, as far as in them lies, to prevent such a result in New York. With energy, vigilance and activity, VICTORY IS CERTAIN!

*November 3, 1846*

### A SINGLE VOTE

FEW people estimate the value and importance of a single vote.

*One vote* sent Oliver Cromwell to the long Parliament. Little thought the holder of

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## TWO LOCAL POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

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that vote that his hand was to send Charles Stuart to the scaffold, and to convulse an empire with revolution.

*One vote* elected Marcus Morton Governor of Massachusetts in 1841, out of an aggregate of 100,000.

*One vote* filled the vacancies of the State Senate in 1843, and again secured the election of Marcus Morton as Governor.

*Four votes* given to the Fifth Ward of the City of New York, made Thomas Jefferson President of the United States.

*One vote* repealed the tariff of 1842.

Who then can say that one vote can make no difference, and that his own is not the will whose expression shall finally turn the chances of the lot? One vote, like a drop of water, may be insignificant of itself and alone, but combined with myriads of others may determine the destiny of a nation.—“Divide the thunder into single tones,” says Schiller, “and it becomes a lullaby for children; but pour it forth in one quick peal and the royal sound shall shake the heavens!”

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## WALT WHITMAN

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*November 4, 1846*

[AND THEN IT RAINED]

IT is almost unnecessary to tell our readers that yesterday, "election day," proved one of the wettest, sloppiest, drizzliest times "what ever was." The contest, however, was carried on with great ardor, in spite of the clouds, showers, and mud. We have seldom seen our Democratic *workers* more spirited—and we give them thanks, in the name of the party, for their unintermittent efforts! . . . And in the midst of all that warmth and ardor, we rejoice to be able to state that there were no riots or disturbances at all, beyond the *argumentative* ones which, on such occasions, are to be heard wherever three or four are met together. All passed off in such a manner as to increase the pride which every true American has in observing the workings of our institutions! . . . In the course of the evening our Democratic headquarters was thronged with people to hear the returns; and it is almost superfluous to add that Mr. Murphy's success was hailed by the Democrats of Brooklyn with many a hearty "three times three."

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## TWO LOCAL POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

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November 5, 1846

### OUR DEFEAT IN THE STATE

WELL! it seems to be generally agreed, now, that John Young is the Governor-elect of the Empire State—a proud honor which any man, however high his ambition, might be satisfied with. Speculations on the causes of this result—on the causes of the immense vote for Mr. Young, and the defection from Governor Wright—we reserve for another time, and an early one. For the present, we content ourselves with the remark, that, when a party is defeated *it is always profitable to look what reasons there are for that defeat in the preceding action of the party itself.* This is better, far better, than to find fault with the “people.”

November 7, 1846

### “IT IS WELL”

IT is useless to deny that Whiggery is having a great swing, about these times. It has gained handsomely in Pennsylvania and New

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## WALT WHITMAN

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York—retained a majority, though a decreased one, in Ohio—carried New Jersey—and will doubtless carry Massachusetts. Besides this, it possesses a sometime elevation even in New Hampshire, the “Old Granite State.” . . . Sundry of our Democratic contemporaries either sulk about these *facts*, pass them by with as indefinite a mention as possible, or endeavor to argue that in the face of the figures, the Whigs have *not* gained, nor “lifted up” their prospects. But that is idle.

For our own humble part, however, we feel very calm and comfortable, and not a bit alarmed, about all this. We look down upon the hubbub, as on something that will subside in due time—time enough we fancy, to make the waves smooth for the passage of a Democratic President into Port Inauguration in 1849. As to the exulting anticipations of the Whigs about *their* taking the upper hand for the future, we laugh to scorn such phantom hopes! Not more vain were the joy of the consumptive, to whose life a frowning fate has fixed the narrow limit—not more delusive were his wild gayety at seeing the flush which

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## TWO LOCAL POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

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he mistakes for the bloom of returning health, while it really tokened the climax and decay of life,—than the merriment of our Whig friends, in the elated hour of their current triumph. There is a brightness to the expiring, as well as to the newly lighted, candle.

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[THE NEXT ELECTION]

*March 18, 1847*

### THE WARD MEETINGS TONIGHT.—PARTIES IN BROOKLYN

WE hope to have a goodly attendance at the Democratic ward meetings tonight—those meetings which will “set the ball a-rolling” for the success of our municipal candidates. Truly, the importance of these primary meetings is much underrated; they are the fountains whence comes the goodness or badness of the larger volume in the future. Moreover, let the meetings tonight be characterized at every poll, by HARMONY and GOOD FEELING! for there is never any thing gained, even in politics, by the opposite of those qualities. . . . Democrats of Brook-

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## WALT WHITMAN

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lyn! the day is nigh when you will be called upon to *work* the city out of the hands of Whiggery, in which it may now be said partially to be held! We are of those who think that the Democratic Party should *stick to its own identity*, and hold no communion or tampering with any other party, even to attain temporary advantages. We *must* have parties in this country; and the question is, Shall we go with the Democratic? or shall we aid the Conservative—call it Federal, Whig, or by whatever of its various names you like? These are the two great divisions. That all the movements and details of the Democratic organizations are immaculate, we don't pretend to say; but *that true liberty could not long exist in this country without our party*, we do say. And it is important that it should triumph in the local elections—notwithstanding we have specious arguers for a “no party party” among us. All such play into the hands of Whiggery. . . . And we reiterate with emphasis what we have said once before, that *everyone among us who through discontent or any other motive, would mar the union of our*

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## TWO LOCAL POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

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*ranks and nominations, also plays into the hands of Whiggery, and is probably their tool, whether he knows it or not.*

*April 9, 1847*

### SIGNS

By a hundred of those mysterious and apparently trivial signs from which judges in such matters derive the ground of a firm inference, it seems to be "bruited about town," even among the Whigs, that Thomas J. Gerald is going to be elected mayor of Brooklyn! At first, when Mr. Stryker's friends trotted him out on this spring's race, they laughed at the idea of his *losing* it. They either really thought or professed to think, that Mr. S. *was sure* to be the man! They laughed at the idea of defeat. They went gadding about the streets, and wanted to bet on him.

But will any body pretend to say *now*, that they exhibit these signs of confidence? Surely all who observe the course of events, must acknowledge that the tables are turned, and that *the Whigs now evidently dread defeat, as an every*

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## WALT WHITMAN

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*way probability!* On the other hand, our people have that good-natured confidence of success which comes from the likelihood of victory.

We saw last evening a Whig refuse to take a bet offered by a Democrat of ten dollars against three that Mr. Stryker would not get a majority of votes in Brooklyn. And all the Whig splutterers have "hauled in their horns," which is equivalent to saying that they don't at all like the looks of the political horizon hereabout.

*April 13, 1847*

### NOTHING BUT THE WHOLE TICKET

ALREADY, at the early hour of 9 o'clock, the Whigs are offering to *swap* their candidate for mayor for a vote in favor of a Whig alderman, and in some instances have even offered to guarantee *two* Whig votes for Mr. Gerald for a single Democratic vote given to their charter nominees? This shows that the "shadows" of coming defeat are even now falling in gloomy weight upon the poor Whigs. But,

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## TWO LOCAL POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

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Democrats! don't chaffer with the pedlars! Vote your whole ticket clean through, and make the enemy surrender as unconditionally, as thoroughly to your conquering flag, as did the *federal* forces of Vera Cruz to the republicans of our Democratic army. . . . The Whigs have taken the panic, and let us take them!

*April 14, 1847*

[“PERFECTLY SERENE” IN THE FACE  
OF DEFEAT]

WELL: the Whigs have triumphed in Brooklyn. They have carried in their mayor, supervisors, and an effectual majority in the Common Council. So that there isn't any half way work in the business; we are what the Ohio boatmen would call a “golfizzled” party. . . . To say that this result is a matter of no unpleasantness to us, would of course be doing great injustice to our own heart. Every word that we uttered, during the last campaign, in favor of our candidates, we felt, and still feel, to be *true*; and the same with our remarks on

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## WALT WHITMAN

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the Whig candidates. We possess the satisfaction of wanting not to recall a single phrase or line. And we take this occasion to aver, that we never worked for men whom we thought fitter, and better worth, success, than Mr. Gerald, and our supervisors and aldermanic candidates.

But really, when one calls his phlegm and philosophy a little in exercise, one can take these things with coolness and serenity enough, after all. It varies the monotony, for *our side* to be beaten; almost as much as it does for the Whigs to succeed.—Then there is so much less responsibility and trouble—so much greater leisure and “fun”—for the *outs*. As to the *ins*, alas! they are always more or less to be pitied! Civil strife, rivalry for appointments, and other turmoil, spread among them all the waters of bitterness. Poor devils! they little know what they have to undergo. While, as for the defeated party, it can walk about with its hands in its pockets, a gentleman at large; and can occasionally amuse itself with the hubbub among the miserable forlorn ones who are borne down with the

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## TWO LOCAL POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

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weights of power. We defy any one to say this ain't so.

The truth is, too, we ought in mere charity to let the Whigs "beat" once in a great while, in some little local election; otherwise, they wouldn't be able to keep alive, and *we* wouldn't have the pleasure of whipping 'em in general. This is an important consideration. Moreover there is another point of similar far-sighted policy which must not be overlooked and that is—put the Whigs in power and they will soon save us the trouble of fighting for our future victories, (a while, at least,) by cutting their own throats. Who ever knew that faction to hold consecutive terms of full sovereignty?

Upon the whole, the ugly and venomous toad of Whig success may not be without a germ of a precious jewel to *our* future crown of triumph. . . . We feel perfectly serene about the whole affair.

## CIVIC INTERESTS

*July 9, 1846*

[FORT GREENE PARK, BROOKLYN]

THE New York *Tribune* of this morning prints the following paragraph:

A correspondent writes us a very enthusiastic remonstrance against the projected leveling of Fort Greene. We entirely agree with him in the feeling which such desecration inspires; but we fear that the case is a hopeless one. Trade and commerce are an irresistible power, and before their necessities nothing can stand. The requirements of the rapidly flourishing city for "more room" are constant and clamorous; and her citizens are justly proud of the rapid growth, even while lamenting that in her progress a spot so haunted with lofty associations must be despoiled.

Who wrote that? It evidently speaks the sentiments of any body else in the world than either of the regular writers for the *Tribune*. What a sneaking way this, on the part of some one, to "whip the devil round the stump!" We know there are a few small-eyed folk in Brooklyn, who oppose Washington Park, from

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## CIVIC INTERESTS

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jealous or pecuniary motives; but even them we should hardly think guilty of such a subterranean bit of spite as is involved in the way of that paragraph.

*Tribune* writers! *all* the New York press! we appeal to you, (have you ever been on Fort Greene, just at sundown of a pleasant day?) and invoke your assistance in this matter. "More room," we want, do we? *We!* Well if *we* are crowded for room, (having a stretch of some hundred and twenty miles to grow out upon, at our leisure,) what must your New York be? If the "necessities of trade and commerce," are so vital in such cases that "nothing can stand" before them, why keep your Park, an open space yet? Build it up! cut down the trees on your Battery, and cover their old roots with five-story buildings. "*Must* be despoiled," quotha!—What for, pray? Is the Dollar-god so ruthless that he grudges a few poor acres, (which the Spirit of the Beautiful, in fear as it were of his grovelling fingers, has lifted high up above the level where he is accustomed to plod,) to the service of health, of refinement, of *religion?* Is no-

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## WALT WHITMAN

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thing to be thought of on earth, but cash? O, let us be more just to the faculties God has given us! Let us not deliberately crush them out and forbid their development in this way. Why should we do such a "desecration"—(*Jew*, we thank thee for that word,) when there is no need of it—when there is room enough and to spare—when such "desecration" deprives us, too, of the finest and purest enjoyments human beings are capable of?

And we are to be "justly proud" of increasing the "rapid Growth" of Brooklyn, by cutting down Fort Greene! Oho! Imagine some one in New York holding forth in that vein to the good citizens there—how "justly proud" they might be of erasing the Battery, selling Washington Parade Ground in building lots, and running blind alleys through Tompkin's Square! Why the man would hardly be safe from the Lunatic Asylum.

*No, Sir Much-worm!* whoever you are—"a spot so haunted by lofty associations, must" *not* "be despoiled." The unerring instincts of the masses have of themselves fixed upon it (not analyzing their own impulses), as a Place

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## CIVIC INTERESTS

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of the Ideal. Last Sunday evening, just before dusk, we were out on the old Fort, to see what there was there. A thousand people, hundreds of them children, were there. In the sweet marine breezes that come up thither even during the hottest days, those young creatures gambolled over the grass. Women and young men walked to and fro. At their feet lay stretched out the hot shingled roofs of the houses of Brooklyn.—Around on every side could be viewed a surprisingly splendid scene. You counted six counties. On either side was a sweep of noble river, with the metropolis like a map beyond. To the northeast lay the thick woods of Queens—and to their left, the far end of Manhattan, and the hills that line the Hudson. Greenwood's height, the tops and slopes of Staten Island, the smooth surface of the bay, and the scoop between Bedford and Gowanus—to say nothing of the other Long Island part of the view—all stood out in vivid relief in the clear air.—And it was curious to observe how in that crowd the genializing influence of the scene infused itself, and destroyed all those objectionable traits so

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## WALT WHITMAN

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often met in the city crowds. They were mild, subdued, and graceful. Is *this* the place for “desecration”?

We respect and admire “trade and commerce.” They are noble agents (in their proper and better action), for elevating man, breaking down local prejudices, tightening the common bonds of brotherhood, and clearing the strength of thought. But we scorn the prostitution of their name, to achieve the pettiest ends. It is disgraceful to them. And they should not suffer it, either; for they are not really inconsistent with the loftiest Ideal—and wither most when they blind themselves to the large object in the distance, by holding at the end of their noses, the puniest and most contracted means.

*December 3, 1847*

### SHALL WE HAVE THAT MONUMENT!

IT is unnecessary, in giving the detailed proceedings which follow, for us again to go over the ground of the arguments in favor of the proposed monument to the American

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## CIVIC INTERESTS

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prisoners who died, during "the days that tried men's souls," in the British hulks, at the Wallabout. We publish the proceedings in all their length and breadth, because we not only feel warmly in favor of the monument, but think that a united and energetic effort on the part of the citizens to whom it is left, will now secure it. The resolutions themselves express the reasons and facts, connected with the movement, quite fully: we call particular attention to them.

The propriety of putting the monument on Fort Greene is, also, to our mind, indisputable. And in this is furnished another point in behalf of reserving the grounds there for a public park. It is contemplated, when the construction of the park is definitely settled, as *to be* to petition the Common Council for a grant of some land in it; and in this, by the city, by private subscription, etc., a vault is to be built, and the ashes of the prisoners there quietly inurned. There is already a thousand dollars in the State Treasury, with the accumulated interest of many years, appropriated to this object—on condition of the raising

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## WALT WHITMAN

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of another thousand dollars by Brooklyn. This vault, and the interment, being arranged by us, it is considered that there will be no difficulty in getting Congress to make a due appropriation in behalf of a monument to the dead patriots. It is no sectional claim that is presented to Congress in the matter; for as the resolutions truly express it, the prisoners were from all parts of the Union, and their graves should be cherished as *national* graves.

[Due in no small measure to Walt Whitman's efforts the creation of Fort Greene Park was authorized by the Legislature in 1847. The agitation for a fitting monument to the Prison Ship martyrs finally resulted in the erection of a beautiful national tomb and shaft at Fort Greene. The monument, designed by Stanford White, was dedicated by President Taft, November 14, 1908.]

*June 1, 1847*

### THE CITY OF DIRT

BROOKLYN bids fair to be christened the ensuing summer with the name of "the city of

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## CIVIC INTERESTS

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dirt"—and what is worse, she will richly deserve such a name. In every direction, over the streets and in the gutters, little [is] to be seen but filth, mud, and street refuse! The unrivalled natural advantages of position in most all our Brooklyn thoroughfares—they having a descent which washes itself at times—is an occasional remedy; but the long drought, and the fact that the cold season, (when stuff accumulates in the streets), is just over, make the surface quite every where, a surface of nastiness, repulsiveness, and disease-generating decay. And yet there is not even a hint of "a better time a coming." According to appearances, we are likely to spend the summer in the same way.

*November 26, 1847*

### BOTHER WITHOUT IMPROVEMENT

O, the wisdom of *somebody*, who is entrusted with the power by the municipal daddies of Brooklyn! O, that wisdom, we say again. For we have just been gazing at the pavement repairs in the lower part of Fulton street—

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## WALT WHITMAN

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the effect whereof is to turn the water, in time of rains, from its impudent current down the middle of the street, and make it overflow the walks, and run down the cellars everywhere! Some three or four hundred dollars, at least, will be neatly expended in this brilliant operation; which is likely to prove a perpetual nuisance to all who pass down Fulton street to the ferry, or upward from the same. O, the wisdom! etc.

*January 14, 1848*

This is really the age of wonders; we thought the marvels of mesmerism, magnetic telegraphs, etc., were enough for one age; but we have just been informed of a fact more extraordinary than any or all of these. A friend assures us that one of our Brooklyn city lamps, in the front of his dwelling, absolutely burned all night! once this week, and the light thereof was still in existence at 7 o'clock in the morning!! There can be nothing beyond this. We begin to believe in Miller's theory, that the end of the world is at hand.

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## CIVIC INTERESTS

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*April 7, 1847*

CLEAN THE STREETS! CLEAN THE STREETS!  
CLEAN THE STREETS!

IMMEDIATELY after such a rainy day as yesterday—and during such a mild convenient time as the present, (7th)—hundreds of sweepers and hoers should be put to cleaning the streets of this city, which are sadly in want of it.

*December 8, 1846*

“THAT” OIL

SUCH a night as last evening developed the beauty and quality of the oil furnished to light (!!!!!!!) our Brooklyn streets in all its radiant brilliancy (???????????)

*December 11, 1846*

AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A BROOKLYN LAMP

(*A serial tale*)

My birth and early life I do not think it necessary to give. I always had plenty of

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## WALT WHITMAN

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*tin*, however. Perhaps this is the reason that I became stuck up. Having settled this point—I shall resume my life the next number. (To be continued *indefinitely*).

*December 12, 1846*

### AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A BROOKLYN LAMP

AFTER I was put up in my little glass house, I remained without annoyance for a considerable time. One day, however, a man came to me, (by a ladder), and filled me with a thick poshy singular substance, (not liquid), and squeezed a cotton string through my nostrils, the ends of which he dabbed with turpentine. The same evening, just after sundown, he came again and put me on fire. Proud of my office, I chuckled considerably; but alas! hardly had he got to my next neighbor, when I found that the poshy substance on which I had to depend for life, was a humbug. Accordingly I went out;—and though the people who passed were full of jibes when they looked up at my glass house, I confidently defied them to make light of *me*.—(To be continued).

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## CIVIC INTERESTS

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*December 14, 1846*

### MAKE A BLACK MARK FOR IT!

THE lamps of Brooklyn, (at least a portion of them) were burning at 9 o'clock last evening. This is "first rate."—What is the reason that for three months past they have spluttered and gone out with the rapidity of a lucifer match? Echo answers 'atch!

## FREE TRADE AND THE CURRENCY SYSTEM

[WHITMAN was from first to last a free trader. He said at one time that he was a "free trader by instinct." His opposition to the principle of protection was spirited throughout his editorship of *The Eagle*. It was a cardinal plank in his Democratic creed. Later, although he became a Republican, nominally at least, he could never swallow the tariff argument of that party. "I object to the tariff primarily because it is not humanitarian—because it is a damnable imposition upon the masses" he told Horace Traubel in 1888. The editorial entitled "Mournful Matters" must be read in the light of the tariff history of the period. The protectionists had argued that revision of the tariff would bring about industrial disaster. Months after the revision Whitman, in a remarkably well sustained piece of satire, describes such a result as the protectionists had prophesied, but which did

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## FREE TRADE

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not materialize. This is one of the few efforts at satire in his work at that time, with the exception of his paragraphs.]

*October 6, 1846*

### WHAT WE THOUGHT AT THE INSTITUTE FAIR, THIS MORNING

WE went into the Great Fair at Castle Garden over the river this morning, (6th) and found matters yet in a considerable state of disarrangement. Workmen were busy "fixing" things—carpenters hammered away, and a small army of cartmen and porters were up to their ears in business; some bringing articles for exhibition, some unloading them, some in sad perplexity about the best plans of displaying "sundries" and where to put them, etc. We advise our Brooklyn friends to hold on a while yet—a couple of days at least—before they visit the Fair for entertainment.

Upside-down as things were, however, there was a sufficiently immense array of American productions to prove that our nation, even now, may challenge the world in the perfection

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## WALT WHITMAN

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which it either *has* attained, or undoubtedly *can* and *will* attain, in quite all articles made by human hands, or from the workings of the human brain—which, we take it, includes about everything that *is* made, not excepting big turnips, squashes, pumpkins, and fat looking grapes, and variegated dahlias. . . . The friends of “protection” make a great mistake in pointing to these noble and plenteous exhibitions as evidences of the need of barring off foreign competition by restrictive tariffs. The argument they furnish runs exactly the other way. We always think, when we visit these exhibitions, how plain it is that we can give the rest of the world odds, (allowing the stale humbug of “pauper labor” too) and beat them then. We think (the evidence, then being under our nose), that if any people on earth have been blessed by God with infinite physical advantages of land—a soil so wide and various that it is kindly to everything that ground will bear;—if any people ever contained in their mental resources the means and enterprise necessary to develop those physical blessings to the utmost—*ours* is that

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## FREE TRADE

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land and the American people are that people! We wonder how the protectionists can twist their own judgments into such a scandal on their countrymen as to look on those little mountains of fine cheap cotton and worsted cloths, linens, silks, and specimens of raw material—those innumerable farming implements, each with some new improvement and convenience—those wares of glass, leather, cutlery, iron, and wood—with and-so-forths as long as a comet's tail—and then whine and snuffle so about the absolute necessity, (the poor house staring us, they say, in the face, unless we do it), of *protecting* energies and results, which have those wondrous and visible tokens!

*December 10, 1847*

### WHAT THE FREE-TRADERS WANT

OUR venerable friend of the *Star* makes out a very pretty case against us, in his yesterday's paper—with the exception that it has one sad mistake.—It takes our figures of Monday, which expressly stated that they referred

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## WALT WHITMAN

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only to the port of New York—the great importing, not exporting place—and erroneously assumes that they embody the trade of the *whole* United States. We do not think this was done intentionally; but it is a sad blunder nevertheless, and completely swamps our venerable neighbor for this time. The exports from New Orleans and from Philadelphia, and the cotton exports of the South, have yet to be counted, friend *Star*. Moreover, friend *Star*, put on your spectacles and read carefully what you see in *The Eagle*; and when you want to condemn, don't dismiss the subject with a flippant word. . . . Another thing: the *Star* now acknowledges that revenue from duties is really paid by the people *to themselves*. A good admission to begin with; if tariffites would only keep this in mind, they would not get into fogs as often as they do.—The *Star's* way of stating it is this:

So far as respects the immense “prosperity” of the government being able to draw four millions of additional revenue from our *own people*, we can only compare it to the ability which our corporation possess of at any time drawing a good round revenue from the

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## FREE TRADE

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people of Brooklyn, by selling licenses to retailers of spirituous liquors!

Now, for a tariffite, is not this a giving in of the high duty principle, with a vengeance? It puts the laying of duties, to "protect" American manufacturers on the same platform with selling licenses to taverns! We invite the reader to carry out the thread of this notion for himself.

In our Monday's article we should have stated, (and we give the *Star* the benefit of it here), that the excessive amount of imports in '47, (nearly a hundred millions) is an *apparent* excess only. For a very large proportion of the goods were actually brought hither previous to December 1st, '46, and were not entered at the Custom House, until they could get the benefit of the new tariff. We do not think, either, that the country is prosperous in proportion to the goods brought to it from abroad. Quite the other way—we think the importations should be kept to as low a point as possible, consistently with the freedom and best interests of commerce. But we can't have trade without imports.

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## WALT WHITMAN

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And we say that the freer you leave the whole matter from any hampering restrictions, the more boundlessly will the energies and workmanship of the American people be expanded, and the greater will be the balance in their favor. Why, bless your soul, friend *Star!* while your school are fretting and fuming for "protection" to the supply of goods and products to home consumption, we free traders are striking out in the mighty game of the world for our market, and distant kingdoms for our commercial tributaries! What is there to say us nay in this? We have, in this vast Republic, every variety of climate, soil, and production. We have the greatest staple in the world nearly altogether in our own hands. We have enterprise and physical power, and steam power, beyond all other nations.—Cut us loose from the antiquated bandages of the tariff system—place us on the broad sea of freedom in trade, with the unchained wind and full sails,—and we will show the world such a spectacle of solid commercial grandeur, not merely beyond all English greatness, but towering to such a stupendous

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## FREE TRADE

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height as men have never before conceived or had any idea of!

*May 28, 1847*

### MOURNFUL MATTER!

CALLOUS must be the heart and blunted the soul, that can move, at the present time, among the manufacturing places, (all branches,) and operatives, not only in the northeast, but in the middle States, as well as the West and South, without feeling harrowed to their roots with agony and horror! The wan and emaciated crowds of once happy workmen—now, alas! with no employment, no money, and not even a cold potato to eat, appear like blights and mildews on the surface of this land of once happy homes. Mournful sight! How the eye aches to look upon it! How sickening to think of the change from the healthful activity of a few years since! What will become of the pale drooping wives, and the skeleton-looking children, of those unemployed workmen? “Where are they a-going to?”

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## WALT WHITMAN

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It appears that in the largest manufacturing town of New England, the people have very generally been obliged to subsist for several weeks past on whatever they could pick up, old shoes, cast off petticoats, (tarred rope was considered a great luxury), and such like. It is known that the ravenous and unsatisfied appetites of these miserable wretches were first turned to the raw wool, cotton and flax, in the places of storage: of these there were immense quantities, and the owners, (those who remained alive—at least three-fourths of them having died either of grief, despair or suicide,)—the owners were perfectly willing that the “raw material” (oh, that Mr. Baps could but know it!) should be disposed of in that way. It is said, moreover, that some very remarkable physiological results have come to pass from the foregoing fact which we shall treat upon at another time.

A dreary silence broods like a spirit of death, over those regions—silence broken only by the occasional fall of a brick from the dismantled walls; or the downfall of an unused

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## FREE TRADE

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chimney, long strangers to the sounds of life and occupation; or by the whe zy groa of a starved workman, who has crawled out from his tottering roof, to die in the open air and sunshine: or by the lamentable wail of some little baby whose afflicted parents were unable to procure it any supper. Grass grows athwart the paving stones in the streets, and moss on the shingled roofs. The pump handles at the corners are stiff on their hinges, because nobody comes to pump. Indeed take it altogether it is a peculiarly distressing sight.

Occasionally wandering through the ruins of the manufacturing towns, may be seen some gentlemen with wild and distorted visage, and agonised gestures, exclaiming in tones of soul-piercing pathos, "I to-o-o-o-l'd you so!"

*September 3, 1846*

### WHAT IS BEST FOR WORKINGMEN?

MR. EDITOR: If high wages are consequent upon a high rate of duties, why are wages so *low* in countries where the duties are prohibitory?

MECHANIC.

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## WALT WHITMAN

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—Excessively high duties paralyze general trade—at least retard it immensely; and that injures enterprise and workingmen's wages. It happens moreover, that in quite all countries where the duties are prohibitory, there is a superabundance of hands clamoring for employment, and mouths for bread on any terms.

. . . A mere putting up of the Tariff ever so high, would not raise the general average of the payment for labor in this country.—That average would be nominally raised however, (for a time,) by what is called "making money plenty"—that is, letting the banks *print* money, and doubling the amount in circulation. Thus a carpenter would get \$3 a day where he now gets only  $1\frac{1}{2}$ ; *but he would have to pay out at least five where he now pays only two dollars*; and the difference is pocketed by the kind gentlemen who so disinterestedly make the money plenty. . . . The lowest possible imposts on trade, in any way—as little paper money as possible—legislatures, both general and State, abstaining from meddling so much with the relation between labor and its payment, (to tamper with

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## FREE TRADE

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which by law, is like giving physic to a healthy vigorous youth, that nature develops best when let alone) these, in such a truly "great" country as ours, involve the real interests of the workingmen. We have only a line more. Has any one of our laboring fellow citizens such thin perceptions—does he imagine in his most abstracted dreams—that all this hubbub made by the pale-fingered richly-housed Whig manufacturers, and their organs, is for *him*, the laborer?

*October 1, 1846*

### DO SUCH ENERGIES REQUIRE "PROTECTION?"

WE defy any one to read the former or following letter of our correspondent, Viator, from Lowell, without feeling convinced—if not convinced before—that even Massachusetts, which has been the *best protected* State in the Union, (her productions getting seventy per cent protection, while others range from two to thirty per cent) does not need anything but her own irresistible power of enterprise, ambition, spirit, and real wealth, (there is a better

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## WALT WHITMAN

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wealth than money, you know!) to aid the United States in “whipping the world,” at manufacturing goods of almost any kind! . . . We are amazed, however, at one fact mentioned by our correspondent—that which mentions the Sunday labor there, as an established custom. . . . The description of the rapid rise of Essex, will be found interesting. . . .

*July 10, 1846*

### A THOUGHT

WHEN we hear of the immense purchases, donations, or “movements” of our manufacturing capitalists of the North, we bethink ourselves how reasonable it is that they should want “protection”—and how nice a game they play in asking a high tariff “for the benefits of the workingman.” What lots of cents have gone out of poor folks’ pockets, to swell the dollars in the possession of owners of great steam mills! Molière, speaking of a wealthy physician, says: “He must have killed a great many people to be so rich!”

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## THE CURRENCY SYSTEM

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Our American capitalists of the manufacturing order, would *poor* a great many people to be rich!

### [TAXATION AND THE CURRENCY]

[WHITMAN's ideas on taxation, as here expressed, suggest that to a limited degree at least he was anticipating Henry George, whose "Our Land Policy" was not published until 1871. When Whitman said, in the editorial of January 12, 1847: "A truer way still would be to stop the practice of taxing personals altogether" he came close to the single tax idea. Whitman never pretended to scientific knowledge in such matters and while he later sympathized with Henry George's ideas and recognized that in the matter of free trade at least they were in full accord, he did not concern himself with the technical aspects of such problems. "I build up my conviction mainly on the idea of solidarity, democracy—on the dream of an America standing for the whole world." "With Walt Whitman in Camden."]

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WALT WHITMAN

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January 14, 1847

THE FOOLS OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY  
TRYING TO KILL THE GOOSE THAT  
LAYS THEIR GOLDEN EGGS

AMONG the subjects on which people have been privileged to go mad, are taxes and medicine. When a man grows ever so little unwell—instead of returning to nature, which would so often remedy the result of non-compliance with sanitary law—the cry is

“Go call the doctor! ride with speed!”

And when that gentleman comes, “he ne'er forgets his *Cal-omel.* . . .” When a legislative corps wants to try its hand at enacting especially foolish laws—laws that will annoy everybody in some way, and do nobody any real good in any way—it develops its folly by attempting some of the phases of *taxation*. Thus in old times almost everything has been taxed, directly or indirectly—not only tangible things, but immaterialities. And it is the hardest task in the world to *untax* any thing again, after the taste of the

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## THE CURRENCY SYSTEM

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stimulant has once been thoroughly obtained: because a thousand selfish interests grow up from prolific taxation, which will fight to the death, before they give up the blood-sucked fountains of their life! This it is, more than any thing else, that makes all kinds of officious taxation so full of danger. The mere paying of a few thousand dollars for two or three seasons is not important. Having a tickled throat and a slight cough for a while, is not very important, either; but where those trivial ailments evidence the sure verging, unless quelled, into an irremediable decay of the lungs, the matter assumes a somewhat different aspect.

As money must be raised, however, for the expenses of government, the question is resolved into that mode of taxation which is the simplest, least liable to litigation, and the fairest to all parties. This is effected by taxation on real property, *or real estate*. All other objects of taxation are liable to so many escapes and so many injustices, that they cannot for a moment compare with real estate.—Besides whatever expense falls upon real estate is filtered through

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## WALT WHITMAN

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upon all business, upon operatives, upon work, upon consumption, upon capital, upon the strength of the poor man's sinews, and the industry of the farmer in his fields. . . . These aldermen of New York who would tax non-residents' personal values, thrown into New York by their owners in such channels as business as to *increase the wealth and resources of that metropolis*, are the greatest Fools the Nineteenth Century has yet produced! The *injustice* of the move is evident enough; but this might be pardoned, if it were not at the same time so silly. Besides being silly, it may likewise prove impracticable. The New York *Express* of this morning, which is generally ready to grab all it can in the way of high duties, says:

The tax on merchants residing in Brooklyn, Jersey City, Staten Island, and other places, will be difficult to collect. These persons pay taxes in the counties where they reside. How far it may be possible to collect a double tax, remains to be seen.

We remarked the other day that impositions on personal property, by an old and wise rule of law, *always follow the person*. There

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## THE CURRENCY SYSTEM

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is no other way of managing it. A truer way still would be *to stop the practice of taxing personals altogether.* This will no doubt strike certain thick-headed gentlemen as quite a wild heresy: wilder heresies, though, have been put in shape and operation in time. . . . The bother of collecting the proposed tax is also thus alluded to in the New York *Mirror* of last evening:

The city must pay its own expenses, and if personal property is not taxed, an additional tax must be laid upon real estate, so that what is gained in one way is lost in another. . . . The subject will be full of difficulties, and if the bill should become a law, we foresee a vast amount of litigation and trouble in determining who are proper subjects of taxation.

—New York ought to be really too great, rich and noble a city, to think of adopting these petty means of increasing her revenues—nominally increasing them, but in fact taking away the nest-egg of her prosperity. Let her rise above such narrow views, and realize the widest scope of what such a metropolis should be and do! The compulsory inspections—one form of taxes—are already abolished: let her chase off her island all the kindred—a most

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## WALT WHITMAN

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wicked stock—of that unprofitable family! As to the proposed wharf tax, surely its own absurdity must prevent its sober consideration by the legislature. It is as though there were two inns, with two owners, and one should be senseless enough to put a raised drawbridge across the lane that leads to his very door! The immigrant tax we shall take occasion to treat of in another article.

*November 6, 1846*

### “O, THAT ODIOUS LAW!”

[AFTER Andrew Jackson's fight against the Bank of the United States, and his withdrawal of the government funds from that institution, in 1833, there was no government agency to receive the money. Van Buren, who succeeded Jackson, secured the passage of the “Sub-Treasury” law in 1840. This was repealed in 1841, during the administration of Tyler. When the Democratic Party came back into power it re-enacted the Sub-Treasury Law, creating a United States Treasury, in August, 1846. Whitman was therefore,

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## THE CURRENCY SYSTEM

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contending for the system that has ever since prevailed.]

THE New York *Sun thinks*, (or professes to think) that "The repeal of the Sub-Treasury Law will probably be one of the first acts of Congress, next month." . . . Is any one of our readers unaware what the "Sub-Treasury law" exactly is? It is a law which places the funds of the people, under the control of sworn officers, barred from the possibility of fraud by the most stringent checks and securities—instead of loaning it to "pet," banks, to issue and amplify on the strength of it. It is a law that, (after a certain period named), the Government shall neither receive, *nor pay to its creditors*, anything but *real money*, gold and silver—instead of, as under the old plan, being part and part in the rag system of the day, by taking all sorts of bank paper, and circulating the same in its payments. This is the plain sum and substance of this "odious Sub-Treasury Law." Quite all the other governments in the civilized world, that have any money to keep, keep it, (and have kept it from time im-

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## WALT WHITMAN

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memorial) in the way proposed by the New Law. How they would laugh at the idea of managing their money at worse than second hand, as the United States have managed theirs! (It is a slang argument among the Whigs that *we* ought not to keep money safely, as monarchies keep theirs; they might as well ask the President not to live in a house, because the Czar of Russia does).

No, *Mr. Sun!* No! The clamor which is raised by the selfish, the ignorant, and the timid, will produce no effect on the *determination* of true Democrats, at all and any effort or task, to divorce State from Bank. With that measure, we stand or fall. Up or down, we will never desert it.

*November 12, 1846*

### CASE OF PEOPLE, *vs.* PAPER

WHEN a gang of juvenile bullies go prowling about of a summer morning, and disposed for a fight, they haply meet an inoffensive little urchin, to whom the foremost of the gang makes some such remark as, "Oho! you're the

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## THE CURRENCY SYSTEM

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fellow that wanted to fight me the other day, ain't you?" Of course the reply is in the negative—the urchin's eyes having been innocent of the bully, from the day each was born. "O, then I *lie*, do I? Take that!" rejoins the young ruffian, "pitching into" the peaceful one—who is lucky if he escapes with whole bones. . . . The manufacturers, aiders and abettors of the present circulating medium of this country, (as great an incubus on its young energies, as impure air is to growing youth), have gone on diffusing through the land all the circumstances of the paper system, until it has absolutely become unbearable—its tendency being to inflation, to derangement of the uniformity of value, to "make the rich richer and the poor, poorer." And now when the twain, (if we may be allowed to personify them)—the Paper Genius on the one side, and the Genius of a Republican People on the other, come in conflict—the latter having been outraged by the former in every way that honesty and confidence *can* be outraged—it is the *former* which lifts its brazen front, and assumes to be the aggrieved party, and calls

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## WALT WHITMAN

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on "the people" to come up and stand up in behalf of it, the poor inoffensive thing so wantonly attacked! The favorers of the Paper system paint the Representatives of the people, (the government), as the bully, and Paper as a dear innocent which is subjected to its assaults; and this in the face of the records of this nation, ever since it has been a nation. Out on such monstrous assumption! . . . Wednesday's New York *Sun* says:

The Brooklyn *Eagle* adheres to the Sub-Treasury. He says he views 1840 in its bearing on 1844. Very well. Nothing brought about the results of '44 so rapidly as the efforts of the Whig party to establish a National Bank in '41. The bank question was not agitated by Whigs in '40 nor was the Sub-Treasury agitated by the Democrats in '44, but no sooner did both get into power than they attempted to force their favorite measure upon the country. Never were greater insults offered to an intelligent people. The whole Union had said—"We condemn all your National Bank projects, whether in the shape of Sub-Treasury or United States Banks." Parties replied: "But you must have them—we have power and we will compel you to swallow the dose." The *Eagle* knows the rest. If its friends think they can swim past 1848 with this millstone round their necks, then of course Congress will not repeal the Sub-Treasury next month.

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## THE CURRENCY SYSTEM

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We say the Sub-Treasury question *was* agitated in 1844; commendation of it was publicly made by the Convention that nominated Mr. Polk—and by quite every Democratic address from State Conventions, etc. previous to the exciting election in the fall—and in the Democratic press, and by Democratic speakers. As to a National Bank, *that* was considered settled by an overwhelming negative, (and *is* settled). As to the “pet” system, let us see the man who will openly come out and argue in its favor—who will stand the fire of facts against it, from the unsuccessful trial which General Jackson made of it after the removal of the Deposits down to the present period! For the method of keeping the Public Funds, then, it were hard to say how they can be kept, other than by the Independent Treasury plan. (As to “National Bank projects *in the shape of a Sub-Treasury*,” we are content to let the *Sun* have the benefit of its assertion about them—when it can prove that any human being ever thought of such a ridiculous inconsistency).

But behind all this outside objection—strip

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## WALT WHITMAN

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it of the superficial guise which the attack wears—we see that the principal ground of the fight has been, and is, *the specie-requiring and paying sections* of the New Bill. It is a contest between Paper, and Money that *is* Money. . . . And here we would throw in a word episodical. No one has any objection to Paper Money that gains its way on the strength of its own reality, and without special favor—the Paper of Banks doing a sound business, conducted by upright men, as many of our Banks really do and are. But let them carry on that business without any connection with the Government which connection does not bless either the bank that gives or the bank that takes. Such is but fair to all parties; and many far-seeing men think it likely to be all the better to a *true* banking business.

. . . The contest, as we said, is between the circumstances of real Money and Paper. It is alleged that the discountenancing of Paper by its not being received for Government dues will break it; and yet we fancy all will acknowledge that that part of the circulating medium which rests on no solider basis than the mere willing-

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## THE CURRENCY SYSTEM

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ness to pass it in and out, "ought to break." But it will not break good paper—it will prop it the more. It will keep that continual flow of the precious metals through the business channels of the country, which will check the dangerous expansions of illy-controlled banks. It will command more uniformity in the value of things. It will leave capital, enterprise, and natural advantages, to spring forth in a proper and wholesome way, without the fever-taint or the succeeding ague-chill, which our past and present most contemptible monetary system not only allows but *makes*. . . . To the humbug cries of "There not being gold and silver enough in the world," etc., etc., of "Locking up the people's money in dark vaults,"—with all the fine flings at the operation of the law-tricks to delude the ignorant—we have no wish to rejoin. . . . We think we can assure the *Sun*, however, that whether the Democratic Party sink or swim in 1848, it will never abandon this cardinal point of its doctrines.



## **Part V**

**ESSAYS, PERSONALITIES, SHORT  
EDITORIALS**



## GENERAL ESSAYS

*July 24, 1846*

### WOMEN

THE following paragraph, which we clip from a New York print of this morning, has been "going the rounds of the papers," quite long enough:

THE CHARACTER OF WOMEN.—If the following had been written by a bachelor, whose nature had been soured by repeated jiltings, one would not feel surprised at the slander; but they are the sentiments of one of their own sex—no less a person, indeed, than Margaret Lucas, Duchess of Newcastle, and we copy them for the purpose of showing what women were in her time! "All women are a kind of mountebanks; for they would do all they can to make the world believe they are better than they are; and they will do all they can to draw company, and their allurements are their dressing, dancing, painting, and the like; and when men are caught, they laugh to see what fools they were to be taken with such toys, for women's ends are only to make men protest, lie, and forswear themselves, in the admiration of them; for a woman's only delight is to be flattered of men; for they care not whether they love truly or speak falsely, so they profess earnestly."

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## WALT WHITMAN

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—There is a class of pert thin-brained fools, in society—and not a few of them “connected with the press”—who think they do something very smart, when they say bitter things of women, or when they collect what some other sour-minded ones have uttered, and parade it before the world to tell against the same gentle sex. It has, indeed, come to be a fashion with this class, to lose no opportunity of decrying the character and talents of women. Dolts! it is their own impure hearts which make the ones they insult, appear low. To him who looks through a muddy wrinkled glass the fairest objects seem deformed.

Of course, we have not looked over life, while we have been in it, for nothing. We know that humanity is by no means perfect—even the “better half” of humanity. But if goodness, charity, faith, and love, reside not in the breasts of females, they reside not on earth. The man who attacks the good name of “the sex,” attacks the last resort of the finer virtues which adorn his nature. Retired from the stern conflicts of the world—from the chaffering, grosser strife—women

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## GENERAL ESSAYS

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seem to be selected by Providence, as the depositories of the germs of the truest Truth and the fairest Beautiful. In their souls is preserved the ark of the covenant of purity. To them is given the mission of infusing some portion of those good things in the minds of all young children; and thus it is that amid the continuous surging of the waves of vice, each generation is yet leavened with the good withal. Were it not so, crime would get the mastery, and the desire of Shakespere's wickedest hero, to

\* \* \* Let one spirit of the first born Cain  
Reign in all bosoms; till [that] each heart being set  
On bloody actions [courses], the rude scene may end,  
And darkness be the burier of the dead—

Might indeed achieve its consummation! For, strike out of existence the moral health which is in, and proceeds from the souls of women, and what a blank world this would be! blank, not only of the refinement, but of the virtues of life!

There are very, *very* few men, who have a truly elevated estimation of the female sex. To dance attendance on them at a ball or an

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## WALT WHITMAN

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evening party—to list a few light sentences of common place—to yield some small “right of way” to them with a polite smile—these are generally considered to mark the highest duty and reverence owed by gentlemen to the other sex. So think not we. A high-toned polished courtesy toward women—*all* women—is doubtless the trait of a true *man*; but the courtesy should be but the shadow of what exists in the man’s heart, as a perpetual fountain of good feeling and kindness for the weak ones. The owner of such a heart would never have been guilty, as we saw a famous “ladies’ man,” the other day, of angrily abusing his frightened laundress—a poor timid, pale widow creature—for having neglected to get ready some little article, that he wanted before-hand!—The owner of such a heart, while he performs the more trivial offices of courtesy to *ladies*, will be mild and forbearing with maid *servants*, indulgent to the garrulity and dotage of the old—and will forget nowhere this first duty to be patient with all who, inasmuch as they belong to the same sex as she who gave him birth, are entitled to some

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## GENERAL ESSAYS

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portion of his kindness, his regards, and his good offices.

*March 9, 1846*

### SPLENDID CHURCHES. [I.]

GRACE Church, in New York, was consecrated on Saturday last, according to announcement. The ceremonies are said to have been very imposing. The crowd was fashionable, and in numbers sufficient to resemble a *rout* among the very choicest of the city elegants.

We are impelled to say that we do not look with a favorable eye on these splendid churches—on a Christianity which chooses for the method of its development a style that Christ invariably condemned, and the spirit which he must have meant when he told an inquirer “that *he* could not enter into the kingdom of heaven.” Grace Church inside and out, is a showy piece of architecture, and the furnishing of the pews, the covering of the luxurious cushions, etc., appear to be unexceptionable, viewed with the eye of an up-

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## WALT WHITMAN

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holsterer. The stainless marble, the columns, and the curiously carved tracery, are so attractive that the unsophisticated ones of the congregation may well be pardoned if they pay more attention to the workmanship about them, than to the preaching. Is this good? Is the vulgar ambition that seeks for show, in such matters, to be spoken of with any other terms than censure?

Ah, who does not remember some little, old, quaint, brown church in the country, surrounded by great trees and plentiful verdure—a church which a property speculator would not own, as an investment, if he had to pay the taxes on it? Is *that* to be compared for a moment with the tall-spired temples of our great cities, where “the pride that apes humility” is far more frequent than the genuine spirit of Christ? And we must say that for such reasons, we regret to see every new putting up of a gorgeous church. The famous religious buildings of Europe, built without our modern pews, and on a scale of massive simplicity and grandeur, *crush* in their silent largeness the souls of the supplicants who kneel

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## GENERAL ESSAYS

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there, and are no doubt conducive to make one realize a little of his own nothingness compared to God and the universe. But the comfortable pews, the exquisite arrangements, and the very character of the architecture of our modern churches, (it may be that Trinity, in New York, will be an exception) lift man into a complacent kind of self-satisfaction with himself and his own doings. We hope our remarks  
will be taken with the same feeling of sincerity in which they are written.

*March 30, 1846*

### SPLENDID CHURCHES. [II.]

NEVER was the Park Theatre or an Elssler's benefit, made the scene of greater crowding and jamming—never were seats there sought after with more eagerness—never beheld the obfuscitated box keepers a greater number of appealing eyes and outstretched hands—than Grace Church, its seats, and its sextons, of late, during a Sunday. Yesterday afternoon the crowd, though no greater than usual, was disagreeably numerous. People pushed and

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## WALT WHITMAN

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shoved each other—and the holders of the six hundred dollar pews had to worry their way through a mass of staring commoners, before they reached those genteel lounging places. The situation of the fat old doorkeeper was no sinecure. He had to hold the gates good against scores and scores of clamorous applicants. He eventually sent for a small force of the police, and we suppose succeeded in keeping “the enemy” at bay.

The architecture of Grace Church is by superficial observers called beautiful. The proper word is not beautiful but *showy*. The works of Trinity are beautiful,—and majestic and chaste, also. But Grace puts one in mind of the style of over-ornamented and bedizened column and panel work so popular among theatrical scene painters. The music, too, is a complete innovation on the usual style of church music. It is loud without being impressive—full of trills, and quavers, and hops, and jerks. We are not averse to the introduction of a little novelty and life into the sacred choir, but such ridiculous caterwauling as that at Grace Church, (popular, however

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## GENERAL ESSAYS

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no doubt among divers tough-eared would-be fashionables, who know no more of true music than a pig of poetry) jars on the harmonious sense, and seems strangely out of place and keeping.

We had something to say not long since, about the general influence of splendid churches, and their inconsistence with real religion. There is not a more vivid instance in the world than the proceedings every Sunday at Grace Church. We don't see how it is possible for people to *worship God* there. It is a place where the world, and the world's traits, and the little petty passions and weaknesses of human nature, seem to be as broad blown and flush as upon the Exchange in Wall street, Broadway, or any mart of trade, of a week day. The eye and ear cannot go amiss of the unhallowed intruders. The haughty bearing of our American aristocrats (that most contemptible phase of aristocracy in the whole world!) the rustling silks and gaudy colors in which wealthy bad taste loves to publish its innate coarseness—the pompous tread, and the endeavor to “look grand,”—how disgustingly

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## WALT WHITMAN

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frequent are all these at Grace Church! Ah, there is no *religion* there. The worst feelings and impulses of humanity, instead of being thrown aside, are incorporated in everything connected with the establishment, and its proceedings.

*April 1, 1846*

### “MOTLEY’S YOUR ONLY WEAR!”

#### A Chapter for the First of April

AHA! *this* is all Fools’ day, is it? What right or reason has anybody to select out *one* day from the whole year, and give it such a name? Just as if our world was weak and wicked a three hundred and sixty-fifth fraction of its existence only. Why, *sirs*, the rule should run the other way altogether. If there were a day of universal common sense all over the earth, *that* would indeed be something wonderful. The great axis would cease its revolutions in dismay and confusion, at any thing of *that* kind!

But we must not run off in this manner:

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## GENERAL ESSAYS

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We salute you, Fools! The time is yours; politeness demands that you should have the compliments of the season: and we are going to give up to your service a part of one of our columns. And as your name is legion, it were well to pick out the few among you, who standing prominently forward, are entitled to the first benefit of our courtesy.

The sour-tempered grumbler at humanity, and at this beautiful earth which the good God has made so well—the man whose actions sing, “love not,” forever, though his mouth sings not at all—*he* is one to whom this day is most particularly dedicated.—He will not smile, not he; but he will snarl and snap,—the tart vinegar fellow! He will not bless the bright sunshine, and the fragrant flowers, and the innocence of young children, and the soothing wind that brings health and vigor. No, no. He plods discontentedly along. He sees but the bad that is in his fellow creatures; he has sharp eyes for every stumbling block, and quick ears for every discord, (a harmony to the hearing largely tuned,) in the great anthem of life. Weak; miserable one! Wilt

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## WALT WHITMAN

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thou walk through the garden, and perversely prick thy hands with the thorns, and put thy nose only to the scentless blossoms, while all around thee is so much goodly roses, and ever fresh verdure, and sweets budding out perpetually? Wilt thou cast thy glance morosely on the ground, and never toward that most excellent canopy, the cloud-draped and star-studded sky above thee?

Ah, open thyself to a better and more genial philosophy, Fool. There are griefs and clouds and disappointments, in the lot of man; but there are comforts and enjoyments too. And we must glide aside by the former smoothly, and reek not of them; and we must hold fast to the latter, and foster them, that like guests treated hospitably, they may come again, and haply take up their abode with us. It is habit, after all, which makes the largest part of the discontents of life. Fight against that wicked habit, Fool, that thou may'st be a happier man, and not be thought of simultaneously with the First of April.

—And you, sir, with the muck-rake—you feverish toiler and burrower for superfluous





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## GENERAL ESSAYS

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wealth—*you* must not be forgotten, either. Cease your weary application, for an hour or two—for your class should hold high revel, today. No? you have houses to build, and accounts to compute, and profits to reap? But, man, you already own houses enough; and the profits of your past labor, warrant the ample competence of the future. Still, argue you, *business* engages all your time—*must* occupy it? O, Fool! The little birds, and the sheep in the field, possess more reason than thou; for when once their natural wants are satisfied, they repose themselves and toil no more. The lambs gambol. The birds sing in joy and gratitude, as it were, to the good God; and *you* will do nothing but plod, and plod. Go to, Fool! It is not well to labor in servile offices, while the great banquet is spread in many princely halls, and all who would partake, are welcome.

—Gently turn we to another band of the erring mortal. Gently: For *guilt*, though often tough, to an iron hardness, cannot be bettered by other hardness—by stern vindictive punishment, and angry reproof. Apart

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## WALT WHITMAN

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and by themselves—in silence and tears—with repentance, and vows of reformation, should the *doers of crime* keep this day. No taunt or insult of their more fortunate brethren should come to deepen their oppressive sadness. But the words of encouragement and sympathy should come—the friendly glance such as the Pardoner himself disdained not to throw on sin and sinners—the thought of the frailness of mortality, but its self-retrieving strength, also—these, like good spirits, should surround the sons and daughters of vice, and cheer them to the working out of a better heart.

Nor must we forget the political fool—the unbeliever in human goodness and progress, and worth: nor the little manœuverer and plotter who is mighty in bar-rooms, and blusters loudly with the sacred names of towering ideas—which are to him but the base counters to pass away in exchange for food for his own silly and selfish ambition. He is truly a foolish Fool, and oftentimes inoculates others with the contagion.

—And as we must stop in the category

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## GENERAL ESSAYS

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somewhere—long as the list could be made—we wind up with that multitude, (if it be not a bull to say so,) of single fools, the bachelors and maids who are old enough to be married—but who from appearances, will probably “die and give no sign.” If seizing the means of the truest happiness—a home, domestic comfort, children, and the best blessings—be wisdom, then is the unmarried state a great folly. There be some, doubtless, who may not be blamed—whom peculiar circumstances keep in the bands of the solitary; but the most of both sexes can find partners meet for them, if they will. Turn, Fools, and get discretion. Buy cradles and double beds; make yourself a reality in life—and do the State some service.

We cease; even though yet but on the first leaf of the ponderous catalogue. And if in the wild spirit of the day, we have expressed our fancies in defiance of the soberer method of editors, let us find our license amid the wide privileges of the First of April—or, if it please you better sweet madam, or good sir, jot us down as one who himself, by good right, deserves a patch o’ the motley.

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## WALT WHITMAN

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*October 17, 1847*

### SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT THIS MATTER OF THE WASHINGTON MONUMENT

SUCH enthusiasm was hardly needed to prove how spontaneously the hearts of the American people respond to the name of Washington—and yet it is very glorious to see the people—thousands and hundreds of thousands of them—eagerly rushing to join in a testimony like the forthcoming monumental procession. But there is one point in which we confess to feel a pain; and that is, the plan of the structure of this monument. In a late visit to the American institute fair, we saw a picture underlined “Washington monument,” and were assured by an old gentleman who was receiving in a book subscriptions for the same, that *that* was the plan fixed upon by the monument committee. Of that plan, we cannot find terms to speak in sufficient contempt! It is a mixture without uniformity, without apparent design, and certainly without the least appropriateness. One of our New York contemporaries we notice throws

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## GENERAL ESSAYS

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doubt on the idea that this *is* the design. *If* it is, it will be a disgrace and a laughing-stock of the whole city and State. . . . And it is to be remarked that while every one of the papers is crying up the building of a Washington monument in New York,—and crying up the procession too—not a single one, (except, we believe, an evening print) seems to realize either the necessity of having an *appropriate* and most majestic structure; or the surpassing difficulty of planning such a structure. The notion seems to be that *a monument* is to be constructed—that it must cost a great many thousand dollars—and that it must be very big. *We sadly fear that the whole thing will be an entire failure, and that every true artist, and most of our intelligent citizens, will wish the said monument blown up, the moment it is exposed to the public gaze!*

To commemorate such a character as WASHINGTON we want, (we say) no monument but his country, and his countrymen's hearts! When they forget him let him be forgotten. It is all well enough to raise proud pieces of showy architecture to your

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## WALT WHITMAN

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Napoleons, your Walter Scotts, or your Wellingtons—the “great men” of a few ages. But this pure and august being—this MAN without a flaw—asks no pile of brick, stone and mortar raised. We do not want him brought down to the level of mere common heroes. By the silent shore of the broad Potomac lie Washington’s mortal ashes; God has his spirit; and his country has his memory. Let his grave be undesecrated by any sacrilegious hand—and let the Republic consign the task of preserving his name and fame to no meaner place than its children’s bosoms. Is not that mausoleum—warmed by vital life-blood which will never forget the sainted hero as long as it flows—better than the cold pomp of marble? Leave such for common men; a higher desert is for WASHINGTON!

Such are our first feelings in the matter. But yet we might acknowledge the propriety of raising a truly grand and appropriate monument to WASHINGTON. It should be as sublime as the purest and highest genius of the ideal could design it—as perfect and durable as mechanism and art could make it; and have

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## GENERAL ESSAYS

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*some little* approach, at least, (it *could* have but little) to the characteristics of the being whom it so boldly assumes to commemorate.

[It was at first suggested that a Washington monument be erected in New York. The cornerstone of the Washington Monument was laid on July 4, 1848. On December 3, 1888, Whitman said to Horace Traubel, referring to the monument: "Rather liked it. I thought the original monument idea on the whole a good one—that it might mean something in the friendship of nations: all that: my favorite idealization." "With Walt Whitman in Camden."]

*June 13, 1846*

### AN AFTERNOON AT GREENWOOD

WE jumped in one of the stages, at the Fulton ferry, yesterday afternoon, and went out to Greenwood Cemetery; which, as most of our readers probably know, is just on the edge of that suburb of Brooklyn to the south-west—and a trifle less than four miles from the

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## WALT WHITMAN

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ferry. Yesterday being neither very cool nor very hot—but just an agreeable medium—and the sun shining out only at intervals few enough to take away from his garishness, but still to show that he was “thar”—the weather was quite such as we should choose, of all the world, to go out to Greenwood Cemetery. We had the high honor and privilege of sitting on the front seat with the driver, Mr. James Gladding, whom, by the by, we should recommend to make himself more familiar with the points of interest on the road, particularly that ancient Dutch edifice with the figures “1-6-9-9” sprawled over the gable end—an opportunity which a Jehu of any talent would have made capital out of to an indefinite extent.

The road from the ferry to Greenwood is a very pretty one, with one or two small exceptions, for quite the whole distance. The sentiment that always fills us about as much as anything else, on going this road, is the rapidity with which Brooklyn has spread itself, during the past twelve years. We remember well what an appearance that part of

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## GENERAL ESSAYS

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our beautiful city presented previous to 1834, and indeed for two or three years after—and what an almost incredible change has come over it since then. At the former date, not a single house stood where Atlantic, Butler and Court streets now run—and all that neighborhood. At least, if any, they were huts or old farm houses, and the ground was in commons or cultivated as corn and potato lots.

In due time we were deposited by the stage, at the gate of the Cemetery. Ah! that gate! What tales of woe—what agonies, and tears, and anguish—might be told from it! We strolled onward, afoot, through the magnificent grounds. They are indeed magnificent! Have you ever been to Greenwood, sweet reader? If not, we advise you to take the earliest opportunity of achieving a visit there.—The effect were good, truly, if the whole mass of our population—the delver for money, the idler, the votary of fashion, the ambitious man—if *all* could, oftentimes, move slowly through that Beautiful Place of Graves, and give room to the thoughts that would naturally arise there. Athwart the roads were driving many

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## WALT WHITMAN

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a splendid equipage—family parties, and couples. We noticed hardly any pedestrians; though for our part we don't think the charms of Greenwood can be enjoyed half so well in a vehicle. We like to walk aside from the beaten track—to creep up the knolls, and into the more retired groves, where affection seems to have selected the prettiest burial spots. Some of these are planted with the loveliest flowers—roses, and the honeysuckle, and the creeping ivy.

There was an enclosure, we saw, which contained only one grave—a very little one—and over it was raised a plain slab of white marble with the inscription

“ROSA”

and the age of the girl, a tender eight years.— Frail blossom! thy parents' hearts yet ache, doubtless, as they think of thee! A large pale rose leaned over from its bush at the head of the grave, which was evidently tended by the hand of love.—Not far from this, the workmen had just finished a new vault, which they were filling over with dirt—on which shrub-

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## GENERAL ESSAYS

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bery and grass and flowers were to be planted probably. We bent and looked down into that damp, dark vault. Alas, how sombre and chill! How fit an emblem, haply, of those who will bring dear ones to its repose, and whose *outer* semblance, as they go forth into the world again, may be smooth and pleasant, but within all black, and dreary, and cheerless!

Still wandering around, we came at last to that quiet lake, surrounded by thick woods and tangled shrubbery, near the shore whereof is Indian Mound, as it is called. It is the grave of Do-hum-me, who died in this neighborhood two or three years ago. We saw the girl some time before her death—before she was taken ill. She was a mild, handsome-looking young woman; and we heard afterward, that her husband, a chief of the Iowa tribe, had loved her very tenderly, and was inconsolable at her loss. On the front of the marble which has been consecrated to her memory is a very well sculptured figure of a weeping Indian, and on the opposite side,

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## WALT WHITMAN

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destitution, this man, his soul swelling with gorgeous and gentle things, was prevented the chance of becoming an ornament to the world, instead of its scoff and laughing stock. It is a dreary thought, too, that poor Clarke's case has its copies so many times repeated among us. What a devil art thou, Poverty! How many high desires—how many aspirations after goodness and truth—how many noble thoughts, loving wishes toward our fellows, beautiful imaginings—thou hast crushed under thy iron heel, without remorse or pause!

Peace to thy memory, Afara! In

“the sphere which keeps  
The disembodied spirits of the dead,”

May the communion of gentle spirits, and sweet draughts from the Fountain of all poetry, blot out every scar of what thou hast suffered here below! . . . We have strung out our notice of the Mad Poet to some length. Perhaps, however, the space thus used may not [be] unprofitably used. It may teach that genius, after all, is a dangerous trait. Its

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## GENERAL ESSAYS

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fires, to be sure, sometimes enlighten and beautify, but quite often scorch, wither, and blast the soul of its possessor. Like Phaeton's privilege, the mighty gift conferred, may bring death and ruin.

*July 2, 1846*

### VISIT TO PLUMBE'S GALLERY

AMONG the "lions" of the great American metropolis, New York City, is the Picture Gallery at the upper corner of Murray street and Broadway, commonly known as *Plumbe's Daguerreotype establishment*. Puffs, etc., out of the question, this is certainly a great establishment! You will see more *life* there—more variety, more human nature, more artistic beauty, (for what created thing can surpass that masterpiece of physical perfection, the human face?) than in any spot we know of. The crowds continually coming and going—the fashionable belle, the many distinguished men, the idler, the children—these alone are enough to occupy a curious train of attention. But they are not the first thing. To

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## WALT WHITMAN

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us, the *pictures* address themselves before all else.

What a spectacle! In whatever direction you turn your peering gaze, you see naught but human faces! There they stretch, from floor to ceiling—hundreds of them. Ah! what tales might those pictures tell if their mute lips had the power of speech! How romance then, would be infinitely outdone by *fact*. Here is one now—a handsome female, apparently in a bridal dress. She was then, perhaps, just married. Her husband has brought her to get her likeness; and a fine one he must have had, if this is a correct duplicate of it. Is he *yet* the same tender husband? Another, near by, is the miniature of an aged matron, on whose head many winters have deposited their snowy semblance.—But what a calm serene bearing! How graceful she looks in her old age!

Even as you go in by the door, you see the withered features of a man who has occupied the proudest place on earth: you see the bald head of John Quincy Adams, and those eyes of dimmed but still quenchless fire. There

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## GENERAL ESSAYS

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too, is the youngest of the Presidents, Mr. Polk. From the same case looks out the massive face of Senator Benton. Who is one of his nearest neighbors? No one less than the Storm-King of the piano, De Meyer. Likewise Chancellor Kent and Alexander H. Everett.

Persico's statuary of the drooping Indian girl, and the male figure up-bearing a globe, is in an adjoining frame, true as the marble itself. Thence, too, beams down the Napoleon-looking oval face of Ole Bull, with his great dreamy eyes. Among the others in the same connection, (and an *odd* connection, enough!) are Mrs. Polk, her niece Miss Walker, Marble the comedian, Mayor Mickle, George Vandenhoff, Mrs. Tyler, and Mr. Buen, a most venerable white-haired ancient, (we understand, just dead!) On another part of the wall, you may see Mrs. J. C. Calhoun, the venerable Mesdames Hamilton and Madison, and Miss Alice Tyler. There, also, are Mike Walsh—Robert Owen, with his shrewd Scotch face, but benevolent look—Horace Greeley—the “pirate” Babe—Grant Thor-

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## WALT WHITMAN

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born—Audubon, the ornithologist, a fiery-eyed old man—and Mr. Plumbe himself. Besides these, of course, are hundreds of others. Indeed, it is little else on all sides of you, than a great legion of human faces—human eyes gazing silently but fixedly upon you, and creating the impression of an immense Phantom concourse—speechless and motionless, but yet *realities*. You are indeed in a new world—a peopled world, though mute as the grave. We don't know how it is with others, but we could spend days in that collection, and find enough enjoyment in the thousand human histories, involved in those daguerreotypes.

There is always, to us, a strange fascination, in portraits. We love to dwell long upon them—to infer many things, from the text they preach—to pursue the current of thoughts running riot about them. It is singular what a peculiar influence is possessed by the *eye* of a well-painted miniature or portrait.—It has a sort of magnetism. We have miniatures in our possession, which we have often held, and gazed upon the eyes in them

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## GENERAL ESSAYS

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for the half-hour! An electric chain seems to vibrate, as it were, between our brain and him or her preserved there so well by the limner's cunning. Time, space, both are annihilated, and we identify the semblance with the reality.—And even more than that. For the strange fascination of looking at the eyes of a portrait, sometimes goes beyond what comes from the real orbs themselves.

Plumbe's beautiful and multifarious pictures all strike you, (whatever their various peculiarities) with their *naturalness*, and the *life-look* of the eye—that soul of the face! In all his vast collection, many of them thrown hap-hazard, we notice not one that has a dead eye. Of course this is a surpassing merit. Nor is it unworthy of notice, that the building is fitted up by him in many *ranges of rooms*, each with a daguerrian operator; and not merely as one single room, with one operator, like other places have. The greatest emulation is excited; and persons or parties having portraits taken, retain exclusive possession of one room, during the time.

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## WALT WHITMAN

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*July 8, 1846*

### LAST EVENING UPON FORT GREENE

[This was a twice postponed Fourth of July celebration.]

CERTES, the great round moon, as she looked down from the heaven last night, beheld nowhere a prettier display than those thirty-thousand Brooklyn people made on Fort Greene! How beautiful it was! Imagine the air refined to a vitreous clearness—the Queen of the Stars holding her fullest royalty—resplendence falling from her face like a bathing flood; a time for the gods to give festivals—for the angels to be tempted out of Paradise. Imagine the high summit of the old Fort, with ceaseless but mild sea breezes dallying round it; not a taint of streets or close human dwellings; but the most fresh odor of dew-sprinkled grass, instead. Imagine a sweep of many acres, partly spread in gracefully sloping plains and partly broken into knolls and abrupt elevations, with here and there little dells—and crowning all, the great flattened apex of the hill itself. Imagine all

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## GENERAL ESSAYS

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this on the borders of a seventy-thousand-souled city—and not level to the city, but lifted out from it, as it were, and hung between heaven and earth. Then you have some idea of Fort Greene last night.

It was a soothing thing, too, to see such a huge mass of humanity so penetrated with the ethereal beauty over and around them! In *cities*, what a tumultuous thing is a mob! How coarse and clattering! So were not the thousands last night on Fort Greene. Quieted, refined by the poetic repose of Nature, they "behaved" after a method that would not have been unseemly in the parlors of nobles.

Ah, God *did* make the country, indeed; and cities—man's work—can't compare with His! To the people present on the old Fort last night, who had been present on similar occasions in other places, in former times—how vivid the contrast must have made itself! For instance: At the same time when the crowd had gathered and the fireworks were going off on Fort Greene, in Brooklyn, the crowd had gathered and the fireworks were going off in the Park in New York. The latter place likewise

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held thirty thousand people. And there, amid dust, danger, obscenity, confusion, deafening din, an atmosphere of pulverised impurities, women frightened, children screaming, rampant vileness, precocious sin—and every phase of the iniquity which springs from the root, civilization—there went off *their* fireworks—a poor feature, not one-tenth enough, with all their beauty, to counterbalance the disagreeableness on the other side. But it was noticed, on the old Fort, that even the display of all those brilliant and gorgeously colored lights—the pride of pyrotechnic art, and which “went off” excellent well—played second to the glory of the scene.

It was as if Nature laughed man’s puny rivalry to scorn, and, in one of the commonest aspects of her grace, would show how infinitely inferior was his boasted cunning. And myriads of groups reclined upon the grass, there, in the moonlight: and one third the great gathering were women, and more than half the rest, children, who of course enjoyed the whole thing hugely! One word more, as to the “thirty thousand”: we have been at many of

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## GENERAL ESSAYS

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the greatest popular assemblies ever convened in this country—and in saying that thirty thousand people were present on Fort Greene last night, we mean to be understood as stating an *actual fact*, to which we pledge our judgment and veracity.

*August 29, 1846*

### A VISIT TO A CAMP, ETC.

WE went over to Governor's Island yesterday afternoon, (28th) to have a breathing spell, and see the California regiment—to get a view of the alphabetical beginnings of military force, and to say we saw the crude elements (if they ever start off!) out of which one of the most powerful sections of the American confederacy is yet to be formed. For if Colonel Stevenson's company—as of course it will—effect a landing on the beautiful shores of California, it will just as surely be the nucleus of a great and flourishing State, in time to come, as that the laws of Nature hold their usual operation. It *must* be so. The restless spirit of our people, the fertility of that soil,

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## WALT WHITMAN

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and wholesomeness of the air, and the facilities there for trade, make such consummation almost inevitable. . . . It is among the proudest pleasures of the lover of liberty, to contemplate, not only the fuller development of our populace, institutions and strength, in what will in a few years be the “old *twenty-six*” States—but to imagine the spectacle that the North American shores of the Pacific will exhibit long, long before the close of the present century. The daring, burrowing energies of the Nation will never rest till the whole of this northern section of the Great West World is circled in the mighty Republic—there’s no denying that fact!—And the new States that will rise on the Pacific must play an important part in our national destinies. Colonies will tend that way. Instalments from the Atlantic country and from far beyond the Atlantic—hundreds and thousands, before whom the wide world is spread, as a map, whereon they feel equally at home, on any “unappropriated” part—the Yankees—sturdy Irish and German immigrants—daring young “natives” from the middle States, too—the Mormons—

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## GENERAL ESSAYS

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the sinewy hunter and adventurer from the valley of the Mississippi—these are they who will form the elements out of which the now Dim Majesty of the Pacific States, will take form and be a tangible reality. From their loins will spring a race, noble haply as our earlier freemen. For of such crude, turbulent, and unhewn energies, the grandest empires have evolved themselves—such as Rome, in the olden time.

—We were ferried over to Governor's Island by one of the Whitehall boatmen. The "California camp" is situated on the eastern slope of the island—and on the southern lies a large body of the "regulars," camped out in army style. In the California camp, and on the northern slope, things presented quite a martial show. Squads of men, more or less numerous, were going through their drill.—They were scattered about in every direction. Here was one who prided himself on the "knowledge he had gained," conferring it on a dozen raw fellows, just "caught"—affording a show richer than any thing read of in Pickwick. One of these minor scenes, in especial, struck us as irresistibly funny.—The instructed par-

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ties were a verdant youth, with eyes as big as saucers, and a middleaged, vinegar-looking, old-bachelor-like personage, toothless, and grum—with a dirty straw hat on his head, and his coat buttoned tight across his breast. Hackett's Militia Muster was a mere gosling to the full-fledged comicality of these two personages' evolutions. In spite of the "high presence" of the officers, etc., we were forced incontinently to laugh loud and long—and a merry gentleman whose companionship we were favored with on our excursion, had to drop himself down upon the grass, before he recovered from his cachinnations at the same exhausting performance. Most of the squads, however, went through their manœuvres very creditably, considering the opportunities they have had of learning. Indeed, the better and more advanced of them, (as far as our uninited judgment in such matters could tell), seemed quite as much at home—and obeyed the "word of command" as promptly and handsomely, as some of the crack corps in New York, that we have heard praised, and praised highly.

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Entering the old Fort that looks up the river, we ascended the winding staircase of one of the turrets, and from the battlements at the top, looked on one of the most magnificent views God ever spread out for mortal eyes to admire! Far, far up stretched the rolling Hudson, with its elevated banks dressed in green, and the white houses of Hoboken and Jersey City—and the innumerable river craft coming and crossing and going on its capacious breast. To the south-west lay the sleepy-looking hills of Staten Island, their sides dotted with dwellings, and with not a flaw in the varied spread of their quiet gracefulness. On every side was the moving panorama of vessels, and flapping waves. There too was the great metropolis to the north-east, its perpetual hum coming indistinctly to the ear. Far above its loftiest roofs, towered the proud spire of Old Trinity, and over the splendid verdure of the Battery trees, rose the oval cupola of the Exchange; while a thick forest of masts hid the shores to the right altogether from the eye. Nor must we forget our own Beautiful Brooklyn, with its saucy-browed

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Heights jutting out on the river, and proffering their claims for admiration to the sight of everybody in the neighborhood. And over those old battlements the ocean wind sweeps incessantly—and it was a huge joy to breathe such stuff, after coming from the streets, and slushed gutters of the city.

Towards evening the military appearance of Governor's Island increased in intensity. The squads of manœuverers seemed to work with more ardor—and to multiply in number. The band of the station, (and a fine band it was), brought out their music, and practiced some choice German and Italian marches. The drummer boys, and juvenile fifers, collected together. A large body of the regulars were paraded on the greeen, and went through their evolutions like clock-work; *that* was indeed discipline. Then the drums beat for roll call—after which the men were dismissed. After which we saw a famous game at foot ball, incident to the same being any quantity of mishaps and tumblings down—all, however adding to the glee of the time.

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## GENERAL ESSAYS

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October 8, 1846

### AN INDIGNANT OFFICIAL,

OF the Great Western—viz. the much aggrieved cook (aided by stewards)—is out with a letter to the public, through the New York print, in which he flatly denies that part of the “Narrative” put forth by the passengers, where they say that during the most terrible part of the storm of the 21st ult. they were not able to get their dinner regularly—which, they leave the inference to be drawn, wasn’t much matter, as they expected to be drowned shortly, and felt no appetite. The letter of the indignant cook aforesaid comes like a shower bath on this melancholy part of the Narrative aforesaid: for the cook avers solemnly that they not only had the regular meals without intermission; but, he says, “In addition, we had the customary lunch at 12 o’clock, *exact*, except the soup, which was upset.” He also sends for the examination of a highly excited public the bills of fare for the 20th, 21st, and 22nd ults., and swears on his word and honor, both as a gentleman and a cook, that they

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were not varied the smallest splintering of a hair either as to quality or time! His testimony is clear and emphatic. He avers point blank. His (and his steward's) dearest reputation and good name have been attacked—and he comes to the rescue—and triumphantly.

Now, in our humble opinion, this cool conduct of the cook's, (or the steward's—it matters not which; the principle is the same) shows a more exquisite courage than was possessed by all the passengers—perhaps even by the captain and officers beside.—Rigid to a minute—to the turn of a steak, or just the necessary tittle of salt—was he—that noble cook! While awful storms raged without, and the foaming waves beat against the groaning vessel as if the next minute was to engulf all on board—*he* was determined to do *his* duty, to the last. Bravissimo! Give us the cook of the Great Western, before your mere vulgar heroes! And the steward: he, too, was rigid: not a fork was misplaced, we dare be bound—not a napkin folded awry! . . . And are such men (the more deserving, because in

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## GENERAL ESSAYS

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their lowly station they cannot expect to get much beside that self-approval which they doubtless do get, as they certainly ought to have much public honors.) Are such men to be cheated out of their well-earned fame by a few dozen frightened fresh-water folk? Are they to go down to posterity, identified with the abominable loss of all self-possession and dignity, of that now famous, and hereafter to be more famous, passage? Forbid it truth! Forbid it, (if that is not too fearful a leap from the other) the newspapers! We call for the cognomen of the cook of the Great Western; we also call for the cognomen of the steward, or stewards, who so nobly did what the rightly judging public "expects every man to do"—his full duty—on such occasions. We call, in the name of all people who expect to make voyages, for these cognomens. It is an important thing. It doesn't make the least difference in the world because it was merely eatables directly involved—it is the *principle*. . . . We won't expand this article any farther either, to cogitate the question whether the products of the cook's and steward's

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labors *were* really devoured by the disconsolate passengers on the 20th and 21st ult.; though we have our own private belief, (and remember to have heard that people apprehensive of a wreck don't know what they do) —yet now, while we are on the matter, we suggest that *that* mystery too (whether the passengers *did* eat heartily or not) be fully cleared up. We might as well have all the light we can get, on such an universally important matter. . . . P. S.—As the Great Western is to sail today, we are agonized to think that the public will have to wait for further information till she comes back again —unless some honest passenger steps forward to relieve the tensely strung and general anxiety.

*November 5, 1846*

### MORBID APPETITE FOR MONEY

IN the course of an article on the subject of the influence of wealth, etc., in one of our exchange papers, we find this sentiment:

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*Poverty*—poverty, in the common acceptation of the term—is a thing dreaded by mankind, and is often placed among the catalogue of *crimes*. Such is the poverty that fellowships with rags and beggary. But there is another species of poverty, the most despicable that can be imagined, and more to be dreaded than all other earthly ills and maladies combined. We mean the *poverty of soul*, with which rich men are often afflicted, and the only poverty to be abhorred and despised. Men who oppress and cheat the poor—men who make wealth the standard of worth and respectability—men who make gold their god, and whose devotions consist of *Dollar-Worship*, are the self-made victims of this *poverty of soul*, compared to which destitution is a Heaven sent blessing.

On no particular matter is the public mind more unhealthy than, the appetite for money. The wild schemes of visionary men—the religious excitements of misled enthusiasts—the humbugs of ignorant pretenders to knowledge—the quackery of the thousand impostors of all descriptions who swarm through the land—have their followers and believers for a time; though the weakness which always attends error soon carries them to oblivion. They glitter for a moment—swim for a day on the tide of public favor—and then sink to a deserved and endless repose. But the mad

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passion for getting rich does not die away in this manner. It engrosses all the thoughts and the time of men. It is the theme of all their wishes. It enters into their hearts and reigns paramount there. It pushes aside the holy precepts of religion, and violates the purity of justice. The unbridled desire for wealth breaks down the barriers of morality, and leads to a thousand deviations from those rules, the observance of which is necessary to the well-being of our people. It is that, and nothing else, which has led to the commission of those robberies of the public treasury that have in past years excited the astonishment and alarm of the American nation. It is the feverish anxiety after riches, that leads year after year to the establishment of those immense moneyed institutions, which have so impudently practiced in the face of day, frauds and violations of their engagements, that ought to make the cheek of every truly upright man burn with indignation. Reckless and unprincipled—controlled by persons who make them complete engines of selfishness—at war with everything that favors our

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true interests—unrepublican, unfair, untrue, and unworthy—these bubbles are kept afloat solely and wholly by the fever for gaining wealth. . . . The same unholy wish for great riches enters into every transaction of society, and more or less taints its moral soundness. And from this it is that the great body of workingmen should seek to guard themselves. Let them not think that the best thing on earth, and the most to be desired, is money. For of all the means necessary to happiness, wealth is at least a secondary one; and yet all of us tacitly unite in making it the main object of our desire.—For it we work and toil, and sweat away our youth and manhood, giving up the improvement of our minds and the cultivation of our physical nature; weakly thinking that a heap of money, when we are old, can make up for these sacrifices. And yet when we see the universal homage paid to the rich man, it appears not very wonderful that people are so greedy for wealth. But let us think again, of what avail, or of what true gratification is that respect which is paid merely to money? Is it to win this at the

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last—to hear men admire—and listen to the deferential accents of the low—for which hundreds plod on and on, and on—making that which was intended as the pleasantest part of our journey here, a burden or a useless waste? Is it to gain these ends that men fritter away the sweet spring and summer of their lives, sinking premature wrinkles into their brows, closing their hearts to the sweet promptings of nature to enjoy; and finding themselves, at an advanced stage of their existence, with abundance of worldly means for happiness, but past the legitimate season for it? Foolish and miserable error! All the time of such men is devoted to their one great aim; and all their fear is that they may be poor. Want of wealth is, in their idea, the greatest of miseries. They look abroad into the world, and their souls seem to grasp at but one object—filthy lucre. . . . Now let us be more just to our own nature. Let us cast our eyes over this beautiful earth, where so much of fair joy, of pure happiness, of grandeur, of love, of sunshine, exist; looking on the human race with the gentle orbs of benev-

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olence and philosophy; sending our glance through the cool and verdant lanes—by the sides of the blue rivers—over the busy and crowded city—among those who dwell far on the prairies—or along the green savannahs—or where the monarch of rivers pours his dark tide into the sea; and we shall see poor men everywhere; and we shall see that those men are not wretched because they are poor; and we shall see that if they were to prove luckier than they have been, and were to become rich, they would not be better men—or happier men. And many of the most truly great men that ever lived, have been poor—have passed their days in the vale—and never had their names sounded abroad by applauding mouths. Silent and unknown—enjoying the treasures of soul inherent within them—superior to the common desire for notoriety—they have lived and died in obscure stations. The world heard not of them—statues were not built to them—nor domes consecrated to them—nor cities honored with being named after them. But they were nevertheless of characters really sublime and grand: not the

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grandeur of common heroes, but the grandeur of some mighty river, existing in a part of the world as yet undiscovered, holding its broad course through the untrodden banks, and its capacious riches not open to the world.

*November 7, 1846*

### INDIAN LIFE AND CUSTOMS. A TRUE SUBJECT FOR AMERICAN ANTIQUARIAN RESEARCH

WHILE there are really few subjects that offer more interesting food to any one's curiosity (and peculiarly so to people's here), than Indian life and past history—it is singular to see that "the public" will rush in crowds to hear Mr. Giddon's lectures on the ancient Egyptians, while a baker's dozen only could be got together by the most graphic and authentic narrative of aboriginal matters. . . . It were a lucky thing could some itinerant author be found, willing to travel through wood and forest, over prairie and swamp, along the borders of rivers, and upon the bosom of lakes—in short, amid any and every part of what is now the margin of

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our cultivated American territory at the west and north and gather up the stories of the settlers, and the remnants of Indian legends which abound among them. Such would be the true and legitimate romance of this continent. Those of the Old World frequently tell us we have no fit themes for poetry and imagination here. Have we not, indeed? Have we no memories of a race, the like of which never was seen on any other part of the earth—whose existence was freedom—whose language sonorous beauty? Far, far in the darkness of the times past, we may turn our fancy—and bring up the spectres of the Brown Men, with their stately forms, and their flashing eyes, and their calm demeanor—and say, Are *these* not proper subjects for the bard or the novelist? Who can produce better? Europe may boast of her age of chivalry, and of the deeds of her knights and princes. She may point with exulting finger to her Richard of the Lion-Heart, and the crusades of his time—to the feudal glories, and the high enterprise of many a doughty warrior. She may bid us walk amid the still standing walls of

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her old palaces—her castles and moss covered fortresses—her gothic cathedrals, and the thousand signs of a period long by-gone.—Let her do this. But we may think none the less of what *we* can show in comparing relics. We may love the traditions of the hapless Indians—and cherish their names—and bestow those names on rivers, lakes, or States, more enduring than towering monuments of brass. We may delight in thinking over the history of those that trod our familiar grounds, years ago when they were wild forests—and in bestowing our meed of admiration for their good qualities, and pity for their declined grandeur.

For our part we confess that we would indeed foster such a spirit. We think it good to cultivate a taste for discussion and investigation about the earlier history of our native land—this mighty and beloved Republic which we so fondly and fixedly believe will ere long stand without a rival among the nations of the earth. [In the course of events, it is but reasonable to suppose that not many seasons will recede, before every tangible representative of true Indian character shall

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have passed from sight. Indeed it is almost so now. The weakened, degraded, and effeminate beings who prowl in our frontier towns, make the name of their forefathers synonymous with disgrace. *They* are no more representatives of the old vigor of their species, than the withered and puny plant that sickens in a hot-house, of the healthy bloom of its parent, in that parent's native plains.

Then, the labor of "extending the area of freedom," into the confines of Indian territory, as the hardy Westerners have done! How few of us who live in great cities, know the trouble, risk, labor, and absolute danger to life itself, which attend the settling of a community, on the far limits of civilization. A hundred Gorgon terrors surround the very hut where the adventurous family reside; away from any knowledge of what is going on in the outer world, and from any communion with their kind, they are hermits in solitude, without possessing the sacred shield from harm which is universally allowed and acknowledged to those lonely enthusiasts. The huge forest trees for neighbors, and a visit

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from a chance traveller the only variety—they live in another world from our own, and though of kindred race with us, have few pursuits in common. Yet there is a fascination in such an existence, after all. We believe all men of contemplative natures have agreed that no object in Nature is capable of generating more lofty, grand and solemnly noble reflections, than an old and silent forest. . . .

[“Now is the time for archæology to be exploited here anyhow—especially American archæology. . . . Why not open up our own past—exploit the American contribution to this important science?” Whitman to Horace Traubel, May 10, 1888, “With Walt Whitman in Camden.”]

*December 5, 1846*

### THE QUEEN OF ENGLAND

A number of persons here—where thrones, the paraphernalia, the trappings of royalty, are looked upon as useless and ridiculous expense, nay, more, as grinding to the people—

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## GENERAL ESSAYS

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are fighting a war of words in regard to the rights of women. These, at all events, where royalty exists, can scarcely object to a woman's sway. There seems to be so benevolent and kindly an influence exercised over a people by the *very prestige* of a gentle-hearted woman being at the head of the government, that we cannot help applauding the law which allows it. Heaven knows men are rough, selfish, and bloody-minded enough to need ameliorating influences—and this is one of them. . . . When the mildest and most well-wishing brain that ever throbbed beneath the English crown, resolved to set at defiance the tinsel stupidity of the old etiquette of courts, and visit the King of France at the Chateau *d'Eu*, some seasons since, we felt a satisfaction and a delight, such as are rarely caused in our mind by the deeds of sovereigns—viewing them, as we do, with the eye of a true republican. And it were well for Europe if such visits were made oftener. Well wishers to peace must hope that the Queen will pursue this plan of visiting foreign places; and, if the progress of steam goes on improv-

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ing for ten years to come as it has improved for ten years past, we could hardly subject ourselves to ridicule by inviting her majesty to come over and spend a week with Brother Jonathan himself! Startling as the idea appears to be now, in process of time we may find stranger notions realized.

It is a favorite argument of those who balance the good that Napoleon did against the mighty sum of evil, death and sin, that followed the train of his life and conduct, to say that the simple breaking down of the tight bands that limited one European state from another, and familiarizing the different grades of society with the sight of royalty as a *human thing*, were enough of themselves to outweigh all the worse results. There is some truth in this. But if those desirable effects were not dearly bought at the expense of so much treasure, and such an outlay of human life, of keeping a continent in a continued state of anarchy, and arraying army after army against each other for years in succession; if they do so much good to Napoleon's memory as to make philanthropists, in exult-

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## GENERAL ESSAYS

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ing over them, forget his ambition, his selfishness, his shameful desertion of those who loved him truly and fondly when it served his interest to desert them, his placing the glory of France before the lives and rights of all other nations of the earth; if this be so, what meed of praise shall be given that monarch who goes forth to produce the same beautiful results without the cost of a single life, the provoking of a single malignant thought, of the infliction of a single pain? What Napoleon did amid groans, the smoke of battle and the thunder of cannon, a gentle young woman (we love better to speak of her that way than as a crowned Queen) is doing amid smiles, light hearts, and the glitter of curious glad-some eyes. . . . If we were forced to live in a monarchy, we should by all means prefer to be ruled by a Queen!

[Whitman always esteemed Queen Victoria highly. On November 30, 1888, he said: "I for one feel strongly grateful to Victoria for the good outcome of that struggle (Civil War)—the war danger, horrors: finally the preserva-

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tion of our nationality: she saved us then.  
\* \* \* I never sympathized with—always resented—the common American criticisms of the Queen." "With Walt Whitman in Camden." See also, "For Queen Victoria's Birthday," in "Good-Bye My Fancy.")]

*December 28, 1846*

### A FUNERAL BY MOONLIGHT

COMING up Myrtle avenue last evening (27th) just as the day was "changing off" with the pale clear moonlight, we heard afar the wailing mournful sound of melancholy music—a dead march, played slowly and sadly by a military band. The solemn melody was in keeping with the scene. All was the stillness of a Sabbath evening in spring—for the air had an April balminess. Presently, with measured tread, the hearse and procession approached, escorted by a corps of uniformed soldiers, whereof the dead man had been a member. It was a good thought to postpone this funeral till moonlight—whosoever thought it was! For who knows not,

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among the thousand analogies which nature presents to human life and death, the ever apparent ones of morning to youth, noon to maturity, evening and death? Nor could the most matter-of fact spectator, standing on the curbstone there, have seen that train of mourners pass on in the ghostly light, and heard the cadences of that melody sinking sweetly and faintly in the distance, without realizing the beautiful part of death—of the passing away of the soul from the clayey tenant of that hearse!

Dim grows its fancies;  
Forgotten they lie;  
Like coals in the ashes,  
They darken and die.  
Song sinks into silence,  
The story is told,  
The windows are darkened,  
The hearth-stone is cold.  
Darker and darker,  
The black shadows fall,  
Sleep and oblivion,  
Reign over all.

It was pleasant to see that the crowds who filled the street, the windows, and the porches of houses, were subdued and genialized by

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some such thoughts as uttered those dreamy lines. For the depth of radical poetry lies in the hearts of all men, low and high; and we would it were oftener developed than it is by the monotonous customs of our working-day land.

*March 20, 1847*

### THAT OBSERVATORY IN BROOKLYN WHICH WE MUST HAVE

IN connection with the present most commendable project to establish an observatory in Brooklyn, it may be apropos for our *Eagle* to transcribe certain interesting particulars about the getting up of a similar institution in Cincinnati—wherein Professor Mitchell played a prominent and noble part. We find these particulars in the Williamsburg *Morning Post*. Professor Mitchell, by a series of lectures, and appeals to the citizens of Cincinnati, got a subscription opened and some \$25,000 subscribed *on paper*. When the collectors were called upon to glean the items together, they either could not or would not effect anything.

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## GENERAL ESSAYS

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Mr. Mitchell took the list himself—sallied forth with it, and succeeded in obtaining the whole sum excepting \$500. It was then voted that he should be sent on a tour to Europe, for the purpose of visiting all the principal observatories, and also of purchasing a telescope. On his return—we believe in '42 or '43—it was feared no site could be obtained for the observatory, but the personal exertion and personal good luck of the professor accomplished even this object, without a penny of outlay. Then, at a meeting of the subscribers, it was unanimously resolved that John Quincy Adams should be invited to lay the first corner stone of the building. On this mission the professor was also sent, and found the "old man eloquent" at the falls of Niagara. Very unwilling to undertake a long journey and unwilling, also, to lose an opportunity of advancing the cause of science, Mr. Adams requested time to consider of it. Early next morning the professor walked forth to enjoy a view of the "falls," and, to his surprise, early as it was, there was Mr. Adams before him. "Well, professor," exclaimed

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the old man, "your mission has deprived me of a night's rest in weighing and considering the reasons for and against my going.—Morning, you see, has come and finds me still undecided." "The readiest way to get rid of the difficulty," replied the professor, "is to determine to go with me at once." "I will do so," replied the old man, "and having accomplished the object, I will be content, even if I shall not have strength to return."—Mr. Adams went accordingly, and never was assembled such a multitude of people in Cincinnati as attended the ceremony. Funds poured in, the observatory was completed in a brief time, and is now in as prosperous a condition as any institution in the Union. The history of this institution is a striking illustration of the power of the human mind when vigorously directed to one object. Had it not been for Professor Mitchell, Cincinnati might not have had an observatory for centuries to come; and many years might have rolled round before the people of Brooklyn would have "thought of it," too. Nor is this narrative without a deep moral for all who

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## GENERAL ESSAYS

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would engage in enterprises of public benevolence, or amelioration, or knowledge—a moral to brighten the path before them, even if it have passing difficulties.

[Brooks Adams, in “The Degradation of the Democratic Dogma,” describes this trip of John Quincy Adams, the purpose of which was to create such interest in science, and especially astronomy, as Whitman displayed. He always took great interest in astronomy.]

*July 13, 1847*

### PLEASANT TWO HOURS' JAUNT.—EAST BROOKLYN STAGES

MANY persons overlook some of the pleasantest and wholesomest enjoyments merely because the said enjoyments are near at hand, or because they are cheap. In reality, however, some of the truest pleasures are those that are most easily attainable. We have in Brooklyn a line of vehicles, wherein the poorest man, (or the poor woman either) can enjoy a three mile ride, for sixpence, equal to the

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nabob in his carriage. For the vehicles we mention—which are none else than Husted & Kendall's East Brooklyn omnibi—are furnished with thick soft velvet cushions, and the springs are both limber and stout; and as to having sundry fellow passengers, why it adds to the fun, for who wants to jog either through the world or on an excursion alone? . . . On an afternoon, (say 4 o'clock) when your business will allow you—and you'd better *make* it allow you, now and then—get into one of these stages, and let yourself be taken east as far as it goes. There walk about the pleasant, wide, tree-lined avenues; stretch your jaunt even a mile or two farther to the east, into the country, and saunter through the woods, and athwart the fields. Expand your chests and let your lungs take in the fullest possible supply of air that *is* air. Returning refreshed between 7 and 8 o'clock, you can, for another sixpence, be brought back to your domicile, almost renewed, even though tired. An occasional indulgence in this cheap but most rational pleasure, will be more profitable to you than a jaunt to the springs or a fever-

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## GENERAL ESSAYS

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ish trip to some fashionable country place. . . . Nor must we wind up our paragraph without adding a deserved word of praise for the drivers of these East Brooklyn stages. They are without exception, men of the utmost civility and kindness, in a professional way, that we ever saw. In New York one has frequent occasion to notice the sauciness, impudence, or want of civility, of the omnibus drivers. Not so on Husted & Kendall's line; in very many passages over the route, we have never noticed a sin on their part either of omission or commission.

[See "Omnibus Jaunts and Drivers," in  
"Specimen Days."]

*July 15, 1847*

### RIDE TO CONEY ISLAND, AND CLAM-BAKE THERE

NEVER was there time better fitted than yesterday, for an excursion from city to country, or from pavement to the sea-shore! The rain of the previous evening had cooled the

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air, and moistened the earth; there was no dust, and no unpleasant heat. It may well be imagined, then, that a jolly party of about sixty people, who, at 1 o'clock, P. M., met at the house of Mr. King, on the corner of Fulton and Orange streets, (where they laid a good *foundation* for after pleasures,) had every reason to bless their stars at the treat surely before them. Yes: there was to be a clam-bake—and, of all places in the world, a clam-bake at Coney Island! Could mortal ambition go higher, or mortal wishes delve deeper?

. . . At a little before 2, the most superb stages, four of them, from Husted & Kendall's establishment, were just nicely filled, (no crowding, and no vacant places either,) and the teams of four and six horses dashed off with us all at a merry rate.—The ride was a most inspiriting one. After crossing the railroad track, the signs of country life, the green fields, the thrifty corn, the orchards, the wheat lying in swathes, and the hay-cocks here and there, with the farming-men at work all along, made such a spectacle as we dearly like to look upon. And then the clatter of human

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tongues, inside the carriages—the peals upon peals of laughter! the jovial witticisms, the anecdotes, stories, and so forth!—Why there were enough to fill ten octavo volumes! The members of the party were numerous and various—embracing all the professions, and nearly all the trades, besides sundry aldermen, and other officials.

Arrived at Coney Island, the first thing was to “take a dance,” at which sundry distinguished personages shook care out of their heads and dust from their heels at a great rate. Then a bathe in the salt water; ah, that was good indeed! Divers marvellous feats were performed in the water, in the way of splashing, ducking and sousing, and one gentleman had serious thoughts of a sortie out upon some porpoises who were lazily rolling a short distance off. The beautiful, pure, sparkling, seawater! one yearns to you (at least we do), with an affection as grasping as your own waves!

Half-past five o’clock had now arrived, and the booming of the dinner bell produced a sensible effect upon “the party,” who ranged

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themselves at table without the necessity of a second invitation. As the expectation had been only for a "clam-bake" there was some surprise evinced at seeing a regularly laid dinner, in handsome style, too, with the et-ceteras. But as an adjunct—by some, made the principal thing—in due time, on came the roasted clams, well-roasted indeed! in the old Indian style, in beds covered with brush and chips, and thus cooked in their own broth. When hunger was appeased with these savory and wholesome viands, the champaigne, (good stuff it was!) began to circulate—and divers gentlemen made speeches, introductory to, and responsive at, toasts. A great many happy hits were made and, in especial, one of the aldermen, at the head of one of the tables, conceived a remarkable toast, at which the people seemed tickled hugely. The healths of Messrs. Masterton, Smith, and King, of Mr. Murphy, and of the corporation of Brooklyn, etc., were drank. Nor were the artisans and workingmen forgotten; nor were the ladies, nor the Brooklyn press, which the member of Congress from this district spoke in the most

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handsome manner of, and turned off a very neat toast upon.

The return to Brooklyn, in the evening, was a fit conclusion to a day of enjoyment. The cool air, the smell of the new mown hay, the general quiet around, (there was anything but quiet, however, inside our vehicles,) made it pleasant indeed. We ascended to the tower-like seat, by Mr. Canfield, the driver of the six-horse stage, and had one of the pleasantest sort of eight-mile rides back to Brooklyn, at which place our party arrived a little after 9 o'clock. All thanks, and long and happy lives, to the contractors of the new city hall! to whose generous spirit we were indebted for yesterday's pleasure.

*December 8, 1847*

### A FOOT AND BOOT ARTICLE

PERHAPS, reader, you have never thought it possible that there could be *poetry* in feet and boots—or, at any rate, in the matter-of-fact trade of shoemaking. It is the easiest thing in the world, however, to be mistaken.—Our

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fellow-citizen, now, Mr. Mundell, of 116 Fulton street, had some specimens of foot-casing in the late fair of the American institute, in New York, (from which he took *three premiums*, for boots, gaiters, and ladies' slippers,) that evinced not only more ability, but more artistic talent, than the construction of many verses we have seen in our day—and that people called fair verses too.

To mention not more than the names of a few who have honored the shoemakers' handicraft—such as Roger Sherman, Daniel Sheffey, (a distinguished Virginia lawyer, member of Congress and colleague of John Randolph)—Gideon Lee, (formerly mayor of New York,) —Noah Webster, (a New England divine, of sterling talent, who was much admired by the celebrated Dr. Channing,)—in the United States; then there are in the Old World, many others—as Robert and Nathaniel Bloomfield, William Gifford, (the leviathan of the London *Quarterly Review*,)—George Fox, (the founder and first preacher of the great sect of Friends,) —Holcroft, (the writer of so many good novels and plays)—and various other deceased per-

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sons of note. These men were actual *workies* at shoemaking or mending during a greater or less portion of their lives; no mere nominal mechanics, but men of lapstones and awls and wax-ends. We say that it is well to recall their names; for they all did good work in the world by their talents.

But the *poetry* of the feet, and of that part of the dress which enwraps them: well, we are ready to go into that too. What says old Chaucer—that venerable father of English song?

Of shoon and boot'es new and faire,  
Look at least thou have a pair,  
And that they fit so fetously  
That these rude men may utterly  
Marvel, sith they sit so plain,  
How they come on and off again.

So you see that even royal poets think it good that folks should take care to have good "shoon"—or, as they would express it, in these days, boots—or, as they would still improve upon it, after seeing such work as took the premium at the fair, *Mundell's* boots . . . Shakspere thus describes Diomedes, (in *Troilus and Cressida,*) walking:

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Tis he, I ken the manner of his gait;  
He rises on the toe. That spirit of his  
In aspiration lifts him from the earth!

Now Diomedes must have had an easy and well-fitting pair of boots, of course. Who can walk, or even sit, with any pleasant grace, when annoyed by a tight or clumsy foot-garment?

The great bard of nature, in another place makes use of this expression:

Nay, her *foot* speaks!

Can any thing be more graphic? Some poets talk of the “silent language of the eye”—others of the hand—but, after all, is there not a facility and pertinence in the foot that is sometimes superior to the others? What can be more forcible than the operation of kicking a bad man out of the room?—How sharply meaning is Logan’s

I would not turn on my heel, to save my life!

But we have, to conclude, a little conceit, in the style of the writers of that time, written by an anonymous contemporary of Butler,

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## GENERAL ESSAYS

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which equals any thing of its sort in freshness and prettiness. He is talking of his modest and beautiful mistress:

How her feet tempt; how soft and light she treads!  
Fearing to wake the flowers from their beds;  
Yet from their sweet green pillows every where  
They gaze and start about to see my fair.  
Look how that pretty modest columbine  
Hangs down its head to view those feet of thine!  
See the fond motion of the strawberrie  
Creeping on earth to go along with thee;  
The lovely violet makes after too,  
Unwilling yet, my dear, to part with you;  
The knot grass and the daisies catch thy toes  
To kiss my fair one's feet before she goes.

*Can* any thing, we say, be better turned, and more graceful than that? . . . Well, what all those pretty extracts are in words, Mundell will do for you in *work*.

*August 13, 1847*

### PHILOSOPHY OF FERRIES

OUR Brooklyn ferries teach some sage lessons in philosophy, gentle reader, (we like that time-honored phrase!) whether you ever knew it or not. There is the Fulton, now, which

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takes precedent by age, and by a sort of aristocratic seniority of wealth and business, too. It moves on like iron-willed destiny. Passionless and fixed, at the six-stroke the boats come in; and at the three stroke, succeeded by a single tap, they depart again, with the steadiness of nature herself. Perhaps a man, prompted by the hell-like delirium tremens, has jumped over-board and been drowned; still the trips go on as before. Perhaps some one has been crushed between the landing and the prow—(ah! that most horrible thing of all!) still, no matter, for the great business of the mass must be helped forward as before. A moment's pause—the quick gathering of a curious crowd, (how strange that they can look so unshudderingly on the scene!)—the paleness of the more chicken hearted—and all subsides, and the current sweeps as it did the moment previously. How it deadens one's sympathies, this living in a city!

But the most "moral" part of the ferry sights, is to see the conduct of the people, old and young, fat and lean, gentle and simple, when the bell sounds three taps. Then fol-

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lows a spectacle, indeed—particularly on the Brooklyn side, at from 7 o'clock to 9 in the morning. At the very first moment of the sound, perhaps some sixty or eighty gentlemen are plodding along the side walks, adjacent to the ferry boat—likewise some score or so of lads—with that brisk pace which bespeaks the “business individual.” Now see them as the said three-tap is heard! Apparently moved by an electric impulse, two-thirds of the whole number start off on the wings of the wind! Coat tails fly high and wide! You get a swift view of the phantom-like semblance of humanity, as it is sometimes seen in dreams—but nothing more—unless it may be you are on the walk yourself, when the chances are in favor of a breath-destroying punch in the stomach. In their insane fury, the rushing crowd spare neither age nor sex. Then the single stroke of the bell is heard; and straightaway what was rage before comes to be a sort of extatic fury! Aware of his danger, the man that takes the toll has ensconced himself behind a stout oaken partition, which seems only to be entered through a

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little window-looking place: but we think he must have more than ordinary courage, to stand even there. We seriously recommend the ferry superintendent to have this place as strong as iron bars can make it.

This rushing and raging is not inconsistent, however, with other items of the American character. Perhaps it is a development of the "indomitable energy" and "chainless enterprise" which we get so much praise for. But it is a very ludicrous thing, nevertheless. If the trait is remembered down to posterity, and put in the annals, it will be bad for us. Posterity surely cannot attach any thing of the dignified or august to a people who run after steamboats with hats flying off, and skirts streaming behind! Think of any of the Roman senators, or the worthies of Greece, in such a predicament.—(The esteem which we had for a certain acquaintance went up at least a hundred per cent, one day, when we found that, though a daily passenger over the ferry, he never accelerated his pace in the slightest manner, even when by so doing, he could "save a boat.")

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A similar indecorum and folly are exhibited when a boat approaches the wharf. As if some avenging fate were behind them, and the devil indeed was going to "take the hindermost," the passengers crowd to the very verge of the forward parts, and wait with frightful eagerness till they are brought within three or four yards of the landing—when the front row prepare themselves for desperate springs. Among many there is a rivalry as to who shall leap on shore over the widest stretch of water! The boat gets some four or five feet from the wharf, and then the springing begins—hop! hop! hop!—those who are in the greatest hurry generally stopping for several minutes when they get on the dock to look at their companions behind on the boat, and how *they* come ashore! Well: there is a great deal of inconsistency in this world.

The Catherine ferry at the foot of Main street has plenty of business, too, though not near as much as the one whose peculiarities we have just been narrating. It has lately had some new boats—or new fixings and paint, we

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don't know which—and presents, (we noticed the other day, in crossing,) quite a spruce appearance. The Catherine ferry is used by many working people: in the morning they cross there in prodigious numbers. Also, milk wagons, and country vehicles generally. During the day a great many of the Brooklyn dames go over on this ferry on shopping excursions to the region of Grand street and Catherine street on the other side. The desperation to get to the boat, which we have mentioned above, does not prevail so deeply here. Long may the contagion "stay away!" for we must confess that we don't like to see it. This ferry, (like all the others,) is a very profitable investment; and from those profits we are warranted in saying—as we have said once or twice before—that the price for foot passengers should be put down to one cent, and horses and wagons in proportion.

The South ferry has a more dainty and "genteel" character than either of the other places. The broad avenue which leads to it, and the neighborhood of the aristocratic

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heights, from whom it receives many of its passengers, keep it so. Business is not so large there as at either of the other ferries we have mentioned; but the accommodations are of the first quality. The boats are large and clean; and the more moderate bustle and clatter make it preferable, during the summer afternoons, for ladies and children—the latter often taken by their nurses and remaining on board the boat for an hour, for the pleasant sail.

Besides these, we have the ferry from the foot of Jackson street on the Brooklyn side, to Walnut street, New York side. This consists of only one boat, and a rather shabby one at that. Many workmen at the navy yard use this means of conveyance; and it is also of course patronized by citizens in that vicinity. We should think much better and more rapid accommodations would be desirable there.—The boat is half the time prevented by her own unwieldiness from getting into her slip under half an hour's detention. She seems to be some old affair that has been cast off for years.

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We have also two other ferries, in the limits of Brooklyn, which in time will be as much avenues of business as either of the rest. One of these goes from Whitehall to the foot of Hamilton avenue, and accommodates the region of the Atlantic dock, and of farther South Brooklyn, which is daily assuming more and more importance. The other goes also from Whitehall to the long wharf near Greenwood Cemetery. This also is necessary for the accommodation of a rapidly increasing mass of citizens who are attracted by the salubrity of that section of Brooklyn joined with the cheapness of land, and the nearness of the beautiful grounds of the cemetery.

The ferry at the foot of Montague street is in progress; and will probably be in operation next spring. The Bridge street ferry is also determined upon, and may be completed by the same time.

[See "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," "Leaves of Grass"; also "My Passion for Ferries" in "Specimen Days."]

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## GENERAL ESSAYS

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August 14, 1847

### HOW WE WENT DOWN TO FORT HAMILTON— AND OTHER MATTERS

SOME of our Brooklyn friends have been touched with the war fever, like thousands of young fellows about the land; and yesterday afternoon we went down to Fort Hamilton, to see one of them who is going out in the detachment that sails next week in the ship *Isabella*, for California. The fourth-rate steamboat *American Eagle*, (we cannot conscientiously put her rank any higher,) was—on her 4 o'clock trip from nigh the battery—thickly crowded with people, most of whom were on their way to Coney Island. We must confess that we did notice a great many pretty girls, but then there's no harm in that; all the beautiful creations in nature were made to be looked at. With this exception, the appearance and accommodations of the "bird of liberty," (presumptuous name to give a dilapidated steamboat!) were not of the most inviting kind. On deck, forward, were stationed a young man with a violin, which he

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handled quite cleverly for a common player, and a boy who "did" the vocal parts,—consisting of divers versions of "nigger" tunes, some of them with here and there a happy hit. Among the greatest favorites was one which solemnly enjoined upon all people little and big, to

"Clear the way for General Taylor."

An unnecessary task it seems to us—as that worthy is in the habit of taking the job upon himself, and asking no favors of any one. The young gentleman also volunteered the information that

"To lick the Mexicans he's a whaler."

Meaning the General aforementioned.

The sail down was "truly delightful." A stiff cool breeze blew plump in our faces, and the sky was as clear as glass; while a slight grey mist hung over the hills of Staten Island, and on the sea-edge of the horizon, in the distance. Never did the shores on each side of our lovely bay look more placid and more inviting! The green trees, the cultivated

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fields, the houses so embowered in foliage, the white sails in the offing, the slight ripple of the waves around, made up a scene such as it was good to be in the midst of—good, and refreshing, and a better treat than books or banquets. No one can tell, except a citizen tired out with pavements and crowding houses, how truly glorious is the country, (God's work, indeed!) in comparison with that Babel which makes the eyes ache, and the soles so weary! For ourself, we sometimes feel a yearning greediness for the wide sea-waters, and the open fields of the country, that "carries every thing before it."

At Fort Hamilton, we found the volunteers, some of them, sauntering about inside the fort; while others were undergoing the drilling process. Little squads of the latter class were in several parts of the Fort. Not being the least bit military ourself—but on the contrary, a man of peace—we don't know whether they did very well or ill. But a companion, whose sanguineous propensities are professionally "great," and who loves the smell of gunpowder better than daily bread, appeared to be

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satisfied—which was enough for us. . . . We sauntered round the inside of the fort, and here and there stepped in the men's quarters. For sleeping, in the volunteer's apartments, there were two tiers of deep shelving, partitioned off into bunks, where we should think a man might repose comfortably enough, especially after going through the fatigue of drill several hours. The rooms are ventilated by open-work overhead—and are filled, just now, with the trunks, baggage, arms and uniforms of the volunteers. In some apartments we saw members of the gentler sex—wives, we were told, of the men, and accompanying them to the distant land of promise; likewise children of both sexes, who appeared to be as happy as clams—although we doubt the moral influence of developing the “young idea” in a soldier's camp.—It struck us, in glancing around, that we never saw so many good-looking fellows, as those young volunteers. Many of them are Germans, and some Irish; we heard the deep voice of the former, in their native songs—and caught the brogue of the latter in many a jolly retort. The moustache and full beard

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are in vogue at Fort Hamilton—which saves a good deal of trouble in shaving, and gives a more menacing and masculine appearance likewise. Upon the whole, we think we like the ancient and manly beard—the concomitant of the apostles, of the men of Rome, of Petrarch and Tasso and Shakspere. [Whitman wore the “ancient and manly beard” at this time.]

The evening parade was begun just before the arrival of the boat made it necessary for us to leave the scene of military display; but from the sample given, both in the use of arms, and in marching, we were convinced that there was the right sort of material there. . . . The first detachment, of about one hundred men, is expected to sail next Wednesday, in the ship *Isabella*. Her destination is California; and the volunteers go in somewhat the same manner, and with similar intentions, as Colonel Stevenson’s expedition. That they may have a safe passage, and the best of “luck” in the future, is our sincere wish and prayer—which we give as warmly as man’s heart can give!

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We were taken through the cook-houses and bakery, where we saw some of the means of feed necessary for so large a number of jaws and stomachs. The bread was fine and white; and the coffee, fish, and beef, looked as though a fellow might be glad never to get anything worse. The utmost good nature prevailed throughout all that we saw in the fort—which, when we consider the heterogeneous materials, and the license necessary under the present condition of things, is saying a good deal for the inmates there. From what we heard, and indeed observed, the young men have some of the pleasantest qualities which can be brought to the sort of life which they are to lead—and those are generous open-handed dispositions, willingness to oblige, and mutual good will and forbearance.

The return of the *American Eagle*, (we can't exactly swallow that name, in the connection,) was signalized by a series of rockings which gave every passenger a tangible idea of his cradle-days. There were far too many people on board, for comfort.—Still, for our part, we had a pleasant evening sail; the clear sky

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## GENERAL ESSAYS

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overhead, and the salt odor of the waters around. The young minstrel who accompanied the boat down, was also with its return. He was a bright looking, rosy cheeked lad—and must have been tired enough with his day's work. Poor child! we saw him fast asleep in the East Brooklyn omnibus, an hour afterwards! . . . These little trips do one good, and we recommend our readers to take them as often as may be.

*November 24, 1847*

### To-MORROW IS SET APART,

ACCORDING to the long custom of this part of the Republic—a custom now becoming general in the South and West, too—as a day of “thanksgiving.” Next to that gratitude which we owe the Almighty Father for life itself and the blessed liberty of conscience; is a joyous feeling for our political liberty. Surely no people that ever lived have more cause than we, for thankfulness to God! for a devout, cheerful, perpetual satisfaction with all those outward influences of government and social

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organization which are so potent to open the avenues to, or retard human happiness! It is true, meanwhile, that this happiness must proceed from the individual's self—when it is to be positively enjoyed; but the Old World is a horrid illustration of the fact that those outward influences, when improperly organized, can effectually *mar* the prosperity of the masses, at all events.

Just look at the Old World, at Ireland and Scotland, and France, and large sections of Germany! Among the masses, what we working-people call daily necessities of life, (good bread, good meat, good dwellings, and good clothing,) are really unknown, except by the seeing of them in the possession of the few who are better off. In the Italian states the people—some of them—are struggling at this moment with far from a surety of success, for a vague taste of the liberties which we now enjoy—a little bud, whereof we now have the full fruit. In still more dreary sections of the earth, and larger ones, the people—and *all* are our brethren, by the great bond of the same nature—*scores* of millions live in gloomy igno-

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rance, and slavish servility, and foolish superstition. In the immense circuit of China, Tartary, Russia, and the oriental regions, what a sickening state there is of religion, education and political rights! O, *our* lot indeed is cast in pleasant places.

Such reflections as these may be trite enough; but they are necessary at times. They seem to us especially useful at present. While the roast turkeys and the pies and puddings, "suffer" *more* than "some," we hope it will not be considered likely to mar the joviality of one's thoughts, to bring in a dash even at solid considerations for thanksgiving, as we have above advanced.

*August 7, 1846*

### HONOR TO HIM WHO HAS BEEN TRUE TO HIS CONSCIENCE AND COUNTRY!

IN alluding in this journal, a season since, to Senator Calhoun's vote in the First Mexican War Bill passed by Congress, we spoke our admiration of Mr. C's. high moral independence; and applauded him for that, through

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the motives he gave, even while we condemned his vote. For there is really something about an upright conscientious stand on great truths in the abstract—something in a man's bold defiance to all mere circumstances, when a wider and more imperious duty asks that defiance—which we always admire, whether it come from friend or *foe!* It is so glorious a thing to be a *free* man; free, not only in a political and physical sense—but free from one's own timidity, from faint-heartedness, from the dread of sectional scorn, or of any temporary odium—free, in a holy behalf ever, from *any* odium! How much more glorious it is, when a high officer of the land, surrounded with certain unfair influences, lifts himself entirely out of them, and achieves that moral independence, in his truth to the average of the people, of whom he is agent and trust-keeper! Ah, while the councils of this Republic can show men who fear not to stand the brunt of this trial, and endure it *like* men, we need never fear for public virtue or public liberty.

In a fit sequence to such a train of thought, we may bring before the reader, the man who

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## GENERAL ESSAYS

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has invoked similar thought, in many an American mind, during the past few days—the Vice President of the United States.

[George Mifflin Dallas, was Vice President and his vote on the tariff bill in 1846, during a critical debate, destroyed his influence with the protectionist faction in Pennsylvania, his native State, to whom he had pledged himself to support the Tyler tariff in 1842.]

## PERSONALITIES OF THE TIME

*June 8, 1846*

### ANDREW JACKSON

ONE year ago passed a noble spirit to Heaven!—one year ago, today, Andrew Jackson, yielded up his life—and yielded it up calmly and gracefully, and (for who shall say otherwise?) with the consciousness of duties well performed. “Heaven gave him length of days, and he filled them with deeds of glory.” Noble! yet simple-souled old man! We never saw him but once. That was when we were a little boy, in this very city of Brookyn. He came to the North, on a tour while he was President. One sweet fragrant summer morning, when the sun shone brightly, he rode up from the ferry in an open barouche. His weather beaten face is before us at this moment, as though the scene happened but yesterday—with his snow-white hair brushed

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## PERSONALITIES OF THE TIME

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stiffly up from his forehead, and his piercing eyes quite glancing through his spectacles—as those rapid eyes swept the crowds on each side of the street.

The whole city—the ladies first of all—poured itself forth to welcome the Hero and Sage. Every house, every window, was filled with women, and children, and men—though the most of the latter were in the open streets. The President had a big-brimmed white beaver hat, and his arm must have ached some, from the constant and courteous responses he made to the incessant salutations which greeted him every where—the waving of handkerchiefs from the females, and shouts from the men.

Massive, yet most sweet and plain character! in the wrangle of party and the ambitious strife after political distinctions, which mark so many even of our most eminent men, how grateful it is to turn to *your* unalloyed patriotism! Your great soul never knew a thought of *self*, in questions which involved your country! Ah, there has lived among us but *one* purer!

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## WALT WHITMAN

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January 8, 1848

[A MAN OF THE PEOPLE]

TODAY is the thirty-third anniversary of the battle of New Orleans, at the close of the last war with Great Britain. It provokes a few words and thoughts of him whose fame will grow brighter and greater with the passage of every successive year; we mean the sage and hero ANDREW JACKSON.

We are, in this hurrying and busy land, not very apt, or else forget, to trace events back to their beginnings; otherwise we should give the credit of some of the greatest Democratic reforms, even of a late date, to President Jackson. It was his veto on the United States bank bill that aroused the Democrats of principle to make a stand against the paper money corruptions—which has since resulted in the establishment of the independent treasury, and in some of the most valuable provisions of the new Constitution of this State.

Andrew Jackson was a *Man of the People*, worth more than hundreds of political leaders—worth, indeed, more than all the selfish

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## PERSONALITIES OF THE TIME

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ones that ever lived. His example, his stern honesty and love of the truth, are fitting themes for both the present and future; and, undoubtedly, future historians will mark our lamented chieftain as among the select few of heroes, great enough by their deeds, but greater still by their virtues, and the good that followed from them.

[“Jackson: he was a great character: true gold: not a line false or for effect—unmined, unforged, unanything, in fact—anything wholly done, completed—just the genuine ore in the rough.” “With Walt Whitman in Camden” by Horace Traubel.]

*April 11, 1846*

[DANIEL WEBSTER]

THAT Daniel Webster is a very popular man, and that his standing is very eminent, we have no disposition to deny—but it is on the other side of the Atlantic. In this country, he has always been identified with anti-nationality. The shrewd instincts of the masses have placed

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## WALT WHITMAN

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him there—and he deserves to be placed there. Overrated more than any other public man ever prominent in America, *his political rank has never been bestowed by the people, in their direct votes*, but at second hand, and through appointing executive or legislative power. If his name “will live,” (as prophesied by Mr. Winthrop on Thursday in the H. of R.) “when that of other men shall have perished,” it will live as a memorial of the instructive truth, that, whatever may be a man’s abstract talent, if he have not the *hearts of the people*, if he have not patriotism, if he prefer a reputation among diplomatists, and the good will of foreign courts, to the wide dear love of his common country-men—the glory of the proudest office is but a sham, and all his gain is loss.

As respects Mr. Webster’s late outbreak in the Senate, we remind the reader how proverbial it is that all “twitting upon facts,” cuts into a man’s soul,—and if the facts are very disgraceful, is likely to turn him into a raging hurricane. But let him storm and stamp ever so wildly, *there are the facts still.*

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## PERSONALITIES OF THE TIME

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That Webster's private character is miserably bad, is known wherever the man is known.—More than once he has sunk so low as to receive charitable purses made up for him by his speculating and political friends—to be repaid, doubtless, by his official aid and favor!

A cynical, bad, corrupt man—distrustful of the people, and therefore distrusted by them—broken in estate and fame—bolstered up for years by an interested few, into whom he has entangled himself, and whose “cry” he gains because his will would be their fall—indebted to the brandy bottle for his indignant eloquence, and to the ill-got funds of Whig brokers, for the supplies of his pocket book—eager to display the weakness of all his country's claims and positions, but tardy to champion her high rights—illumined with the fallacious halo of a reputation never warranted, which patriotism, the highest virtue, after all, in politics, refuses to endorse, and which is fading away from him with every successive year—all that, and more, is Daniel Webster, in whose life the young Democrats

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## WALT WHITMAN

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of our country may see a caution from nearly all dangerous political errors and selfishnesses.

*April 23, 1847*

### MR. WEBSTER: THE GREAT BRIBED

WE spoke on several occasions and in emphatic terms last spring of the political gift, (call it bribe, or call it donation, it is the *purport* of the thing that we condemn,) the \$100,000 made over by the Whigs and monopolists of the East to Mr. Senator Webster. And we must say that we have been amazed at seeing so little stress laid upon that transaction by the Democratic press throughout the Union! It is a public transaction, of a public man, involving public interests—not to say the public honor of the highest legislative body in the land, through one of its members—and thus fit for public comment.

[“I heard Webster often—heard him deliver some of the greatest of his political speeches. The effect he had on me was more of grandeur of manner, size, importance, power—the

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## PERSONALITIES OF THE TIME

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breathing forth of these—than of things said, anything said.” “With Walt Whitman in Camden,” by Horace Traubel.]

*August 28, 1847*

### TODAY'S GLOOMY NEWS

RARELY has a sadder phrase fall'n on the ears of the people than that which met us so appallingly this morning—and which yet passes, with an almost incredulous wonder, from man to man: “Silas Wright is dead.” Ah, it has a crashing effect, still! and we can hardly write the words. Our hopes, in common with those of nearly all the members of the Democratic party of this State, and indeed of the other States, were so identified with this man—relied so upon him in the future—we were so accustomed to look upon him as our tower of strength, and as a shield for righteous principle—that we indeed feel pressed to the very earth by such an unexpected blow! We confess that we loved Silas Wright, as a true Democratic friend of the people, with a love which was not exceeded by our feeling toward

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## WALT WHITMAN

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any man who ever adorned our party—not even by our love and respect for Jackson. The late governor was A MAN; Alas! we fear we shall indeed never “look upon his like again.”

Amid the degrading elements that now-a-days so mix up with politics, it is like a beam of heavenly radiance—the character of Silas Wright. He was a perfectly upright, honest politician. He never betrayed either his friends or his own conscience.—He thought more of his honor than of his preferment; and of the latter, never except in connection with the interests of the people and his sincerely felt political faith. He was always averse to taking office, and could have been President of the United States, since the last election, had he not disdained, with a lofty scorn, to take what fairly belonged to him. Far, far, far beyond the common herd of “great” statesmen was Silas Wright. In the mere strife for elective success, or the enjoyment of distinguished rank, he saw no pleasure. Like the massive heroes of antiquity—and equal to the noblest of them—he thought it best to serve his country as she needed him, and then

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## PERSONALITIES OF THE TIME

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retreat from the tinsel and the crowd, to the simplicity of his farm—to his fields, his plough—to nature and his books. An august character! O, may every Democratic young man, (as surely they will!) treasure his example and his precepts, in the same honor with Jefferson's—than whom he we are now called upon to mourn was not a particle less worthy the love of all who love human liberty.

Silas Wright had in himself all that goes to make up a truly great man, (that so often misused phrase.) He had Washington's distinguishing characteristics; *he loved truth, right and justice*, in every thing—in politics, in debate, in laws, in his private and public action. No truckler was he to the modern doctrine among politicians, incorrectly termed *expediency*. His mental vision had a mightier, ampler reach: his flight, to that of the others, was as the flight of an eagle to the common fowls of the air. Like Jefferson he fully took in the theories of things—the ideal, without which the practical is but systemless and cold. He had Jackson's indomitable will, when convinced of his proper course. He had Van Buren's

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## WALT WHITMAN

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blandness of tone. And all these were beautifully compounded—as the tints that make up a divine picture.

And yet amid our tears, we are fain to think that the better part of him—his example and his spotless fame—yet remain to the young men, and the future men, of the Republic! And that is truly glorious! Not a brighter or more precious heritage can be bestowed upon us; not even the glory of the Revolutionary fathers, nor the memory of the brave who have fallen in battle. We can ill spare him, especially at this time, when great events, big with the fate of future empires and of teeming generations, are coming to be ushered on our national stage. But the God who rules all has allowed this thing to be; and, in the ordinations of the world, it is doubtless susceptible of good, amid its manifold evil.

*October 14, 1846*

### GENERAL TAYLOR

THE more we hear and read of this man, the more we think he in many respects resembles

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## PERSONALITIES OF THE TIME

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Washington. In moderation, in the most immovable firmness, in caution, in a fatherly regard for his troops,—and, we may add, in a repugnance to carry out the results of war to an extreme of severity against the enemy—it is not too much to say that our Commander on the Rio Grande, emulates the Great Commander of our Revolution. The former prefers—like the latter preferred—to effect positively a measured advantage, rather than grasp after a more brilliant one, and run the risk of losing all, and certainly of losing much; he prefers substance to mere glory—is not ashamed to be generous to a weak foe—seeks to blend in all his acts, a due forbearance—which is so difficult, with the emphatic movements required in our Mexican campaign.

Some of our contemporaries are vexed because General Taylor did not make sharper terms with the Mexicans at Monterey, did not, (we suppose) signalise his victory with more carnage, and glut the cravings of a bloody appetite with a greater infliction of death and disaster. It is a sad commentary on public gratitude for public services that these com-

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WALT WHITMAN

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plaints are so open and cool; for General Taylor's services might entitle him to a little of that forbearance due even the mistakes of such a man. But that General Taylor has made the least mistake in granting the terms he did grant to Ampudia, it is idle to assert! It is idle—or rather it is presumptuous—for any one, distant from the field of operations, and knowing little of many hidden influences which doubtless had a potent bearing there—to put forward his flippant criticisms on a man who has showed such masterly qualities for his position, as General Taylor has showed.

\* \* \* We honor General Taylor the more that he granted generous terms to a foe in his power—that he preferred all the solid results of a sure and less bloody triumph, to the more brilliant contingency of storming the citadel, of immense slaughter on both sides, and taking a ponderous army prisoners of war. What could he do with prisoners twice the amount of his own force, and in an enemy's country? It would look very showy in print to tell about the deadly struggle, and the triumph that would afterwards have followed; but we, for

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## PERSONALITIES OF THE TIME

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one, prefer the quieter and surer plan which Taylor decided on,—and we honor him that he chose that nobler course—which a commoner hero doubtless, would not have done.

May 14, 1846

### MR. CALHOUN

WE like a bold honest *morally* heroic man! We therefore like John C. Calhoun. We like him, though he runs directly in the teeth of what we think was his first duty as a Senator of the United States. In his view of things, it was not *right* to vote for a certain bill because it had a wrong preamble; he therefore, from motives whose lofty purity make sweet the deed, refused to vote at all. And while, we repeat, we condemn his implied negative—for the occasion is a pressing one, and the provocation of Mexico has been great—we admire the chivalrous courage which can *defy* a storm of popular excitement and enthusiasm, in behalf of what the courageous one thinks right. We admire it the more that it is so rare in these degenerate days. We believe that a higher

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## WALT WHITMAN

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souled patriot never trod on American soil, than is John C. Calhoun. He reminds us of some of those old Roman heroes who in great crises sat as calm as the rocks of Heaven, while every thing else was turmoil and disquietude —the hero-senators that stood disdainfully in the capitol with their robes about them, when the approach of a conquering invader scattered all the rest of Rome.

*July 15, 1846*

### OLD MRS. [ALEXANDER] HAMILTON

THIS venerable relict of a man who, in his time, sowed the seeds of some good and much evil, is one of the most interesting women, perhaps, in America. Aged, to the extremest limit of human life—bent to the earth with the accumulated pressure of time upon her head—she is yet untiring in her course of benevolence and mercy. We have several times met her in New York, engaged in these missions of love. She is at the head of one or two charitable institutions in the commercial metropolis; and though generally at Washington a part of the

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## PERSONALITIES OF THE TIME

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winter, finds time, we understand, to perform her duties without remissness. So old—connected with the men and things of a past age—Mrs. Hamilton seems to us one of *the* characters of what may be called a beginning to American history.

Although we are not familiar with the matter of the “Hamilton papers” and the bill lately passed in the United States Senate for the “relief” (as it is technically called) of Mrs. Hamilton, we feel sure that any thing which has a bearing on the affairs of the time when Mr. Hamilton bore so conspicuous a part in public life, must be well worthy preservation by the Government—and that mere dollars are nothing compared with it. For this reason we are glad that Congress is making a move to get and keep these papers among the archives of the Republic—for that, we take it, is the amount of the “relief” bill.

For those who note such things, it may be thought not amiss to mention that last Monday, when the Senate passed the Hamilton bill, was the forty-second anniversary of the death of Alexander Hamilton. We admire

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## WALT WHITMAN

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the talents of such a man, but, of course, (with Democratic feelings) can sympathise with very few of his principles.

[“Hamilton was an intellectual: cold, dispassionate, calculating: yet he was truly a patriot—performed no inconsiderable part in the consummation of the American revolt: but Hamilton was a monarchist: there was nothing in him to appeal to our Democratic instincts—to the ideals we hold so dear to-day.” “With Walt Whitman in Camden,” November 20, 1888.]

*September 8, 1846*

MR. [GEORGE] BANCROFT

THE way in which a truly noble man is sometimes badgered and annoyed by the continued attacks of petty persecutors, is one of those strange sights that now and then turn up, to the disgrace of humanity! Mr. Bancroft, the present Secretary of the Navy, has been made the mark for more opprobrium by the aristocratic cliques, (for we have such here

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## PERSONALITIES OF THE TIME

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—and more powerful are they than people imagine,) than even the President himself. The enemies of Democracy, like death, “love a shining mark.” Step by step, they followed General Jackson in his bold progress of reform, with every missile that malice and deadly venom could furnish them. Step by step, they are following Mr. Bancroft—and it is said, that broken in health, the Secretary of the Navy intends to give up his post. Whether he does or not, his name and services in connection with his present station ought to be held in grateful remembrance by the people of the United States for many a long year yet! He has dared to begin to apply—and even in that he has been bitterly resisted—the dictates of common sense in the management of the navy. The high conservative spirit, too long pervading that institution—the abominable favoritism—have been by him disregarded. Other Secretaries have not remained unaware of those evils; but they have not dared to grapple with them—for the evils were apparently a part of the system. Mr. Bancroft *has* dared to grapple with them—and for

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## WALT WHITMAN

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that we thank him. In the name of the common people, and of justice, and of the consistency of our institutions, we thank him. And though the people, (who are proud of our "gallant" navy, and care not enough to probe beneath the surface,) attend but rarely to the facts connected with the hitherto administration of the Navy, and the truckling of those who should have been its heads, to the officers—we feel every confidence that the more the public know, the wider and brighter will stand Mr. Bancroft's fame, as the originator of reform in the navy. And as it is the high privilege of true reform, in this country, when once started to "press onward" sooner or later to its full development, we have every faith in the fruition of the seed this noble Democrat has sown.

*December 22, 1846*

### HEALTH AND PROSPERITY GO WITH HIM!

HENRY CLAY arrived in New Orleans on board the steamer *Magnolia* on the 11th inst. He spends the winter in the Crescent City. And there may he spend it pleasantly and well!

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## PERSONALITIES OF THE TIME

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For Henry Clay is a noble souled fellow—baring his politics. And even with them, he is the truest, heartiest man the Whigs ever had! “Luck” to him we say again—in everything but the Presidency!

*May 22, 1847*

[COLONEL JEFFERSON DAVIS]

THE promotion of Colonel Jefferson Davis, who commanded the Mississippi regiment of fire-eaters in the battle of Monterey and Buena Vista, to the rank of brigadier general, in place of General Pillow, promoted, will give satisfaction to the friends of the service throughout the country. A braver man never wielded a sword. The extraordinary efficiency of the Mississippi regiment is doubtless due in a measure to the spirit of their leader.

*August 26, 1846*

WE MUST LAUGH AT THIS, THOUGH  
WE RESPECT MR. CLAY!

A HATTER in Philadelphia made a hat for Henry Clay, a few days since, and, in a letter

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## WALT WHITMAN

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accompanying the gift, states that he sends the hat "to guard that head which has so long and nobly advocated the protection of American manufacturers;" and Mr. Clay replies, among other pretty things, that "it fits my head as exactly as if it had been used instead of the *customary block* in making the hat."

*December 15, 1846.*

JOHN QUINCY ADAMS

WHEN the roll of Congress was called on Monday last, the silence which was the only response to the name of John Quincy Adams was impressively felt. The venerable statesman had been celebrated for his prompt and strict attendance to the duties of his position; which it is now doubtful whether he will ever again assume.

## "THE ART OF HEALTH"

*June 4, 1846*

### "ART OF HEALTH"

ONE or two persons have done us the favor to write us, somewhat sharply, in reference to our remarks made a day or two since, about health and the innovations on old medical art. We are not surprised that physicians should frown on whatever questions their despotic and too-long-acknowledged authority in matters of this kind. As to the old drugging up and bleeding system, which one of our correspondents argues so warmly for yet, we consider it full of nonsense to the very brim. Like all tyrants, this system will not even allow inquiry into its own "divine right." After a man, (we consider, however,) has been educated in it and received his diploma, and begun his purging, blistering, prostrating career, it is expecting too much from weak human nature to think that that man will quarrel not merely with his bread and butter, but with his

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## WALT WHITMAN

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long prepared belief, and the contagion of belief around him. To do this, requires a union of the rarest and noblest qualities—an eye of intrinsic penetration, a natural clearness to perceive the errors which have been ingrained through education, and a power to lift one's self out from them.

Indeed, to give medicine for any given disease, *because* that medicine has apparently cured the same disease in another person, is one of the most dangerous as it is the most common follies of the school faculty. It would be well if those that practice the healing art, (a ridiculous term, if we mean by it drugging sicker those who are only a little sick!) would go no further than they had a light to their steps. Their pride makes them ashamed to confess an ignorance, which none short of supernatural power could avoid. Blindly thus, they sacrifice human life to their own miserable vanity! This is monstrous, and has no excuse at all!

[Whitman never changed his ideas of medicine, as his doctors and friends during

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## "THE ART OF HEALTH"

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his long invalid years at Camden have testified. See "Health, (Old Style)" in "Good-Bye My Fancy."]

June 10, 1846

### BATHING—CLEANLINESS—PERSONAL BEAUTY

WE notice the adornment of our Brooklyn shores—as well as the supplying of a widely needed convenience—by a new and handsome Swimming Bath, anchored, within a day or two, just east of the Fulton Ferry. The building itself is characterized by no small degree of merit and completeness; Mr. Gray, the proprietor, seeming determined not to be outdone by his New York contemporaries, who have the baths at the Battery. This of Gray's will not suffer by comparison with them. We shall now be able to reap all the advantages of the custom to which the building we allude is to be appropriated, without going away from our own shores. And we hope that the public *will* make it their business to reap those advantages. We were glad enough, could we see bathing more generally practiced.

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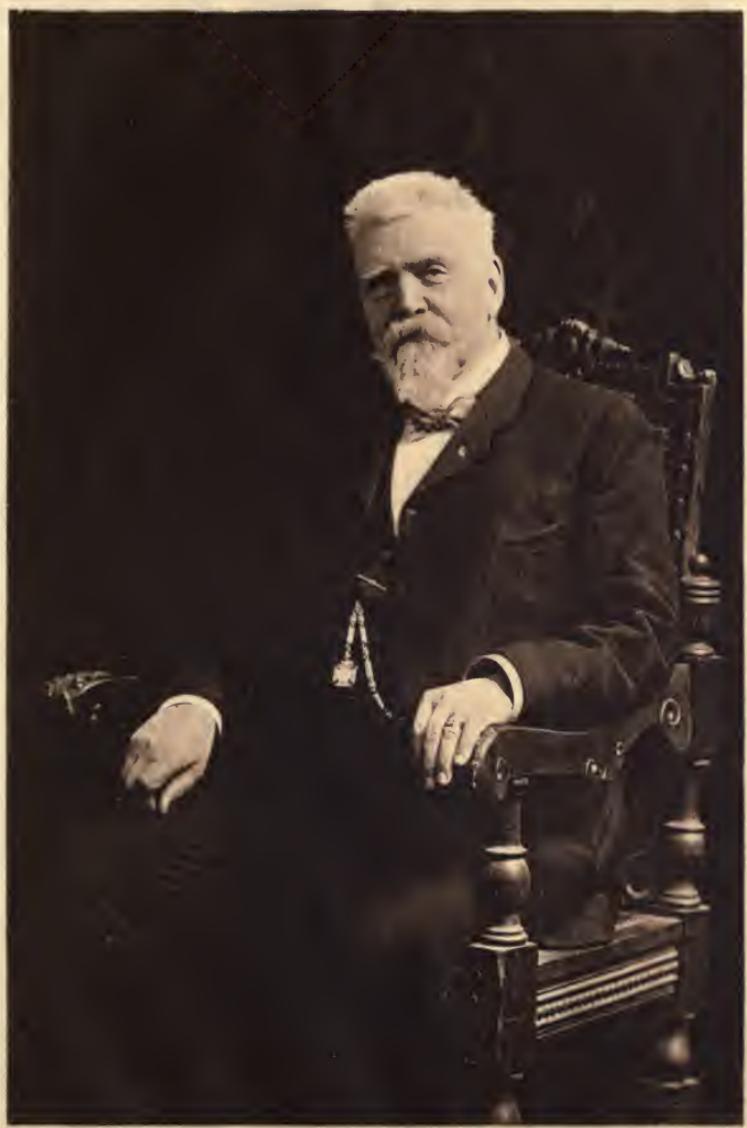
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## WALT WHITMAN

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Brooklyn would be a healthier city even than it is, if the semi-weekly bath, during the summer were a rigid rule for *all* our citizens—for all ages and both sexes.

Though a stale remark, it can hardly be said too often, that personal cleanliness is one of the necessary agents to health. When the skin is not frequently washed, the pores are impeded, and the insensible perspiration, as important a conveyancer of superfluous matter from the body as any other organ—does not go on properly. What man, woman, or child, can be said to be in health, when he or she is incrusted from head to foot in an impure coat formed by dry exhalations, or solid particles? conveyed from or through the clothes? We all know how important for good or for evil, is the condition of the stomach upon us—how it regulates our comfort or discomfort, our good temper or querulousness; but we do not all know, or, if we know, do not heed, that the skin is equally important as the stomach and if it is not kept in a healthy condition, just as much disarrangement of the physical functions follows. And we cannot keep the





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## "THE ART OF HEALTH"

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skin healthy without frequent lavations of the whole body in pure water. It is impossible to calculate the benefits of this simple practice. The direct results in the freshness and vigor of the limbs, are more than enough to repay all the trouble of bathing. But there is more. A lightness and elasticity—a dissolving away of all heaviness or dullness of spirits—a buoyancy—become a habit of mind and body in the bather. And if you do not choose to go to the bath house, it is well to have the purifying operation in your own room. All that is necessary is a basin of water, a sponge, and a coarse towel.

As a matter of personal beauty, too, the bath is important. It gives the complexion a clear and wholesome tint, blending the red and white together upon the cheeks, and freeing the system from a hundred gross humors, all poisonous to personal good looks. We all wish to make as handsome appearance as possible in the eyes of our friends and the world. Few know what an important aid to good looks is regular bathing. The salt swimming baths are best for summer, and tepid water for winter.

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## WALT WHITMAN

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And why, indeed, could we not have, in Brooklyn, a couple of *Free Baths*? They have them in many European cities, of not near our size, where the conveniences of getting water are not near as complete as here. If our local officers had anything like a judicious sense of public health and economy, a year from this time would see such Free Baths as we mention. Neither is it to be apprehended that the system, on the plan proposed, might bring such a set of customers as decorous and quiet people would not like to go among. There is no more danger of that at cheap baths than at cheap eating houses. Regulations could easily be made to preserve order and propriety. The expense would be very insignificant; and immense numbers of the laboring classes would then be able to enjoy—what they will not, as long as there is a price upon it—the luxury of a frequent bath.

Intelligent foreigners who have travelled in various parts of the world, frequently notice, upon their passage through this country, the rarity of baths and the custom of bathing among the better order of Americans. As far as Brooklyn is concerned, there is indeed no

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## "THE ART OF HEALTH"

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excuse for this rarity at all—for the means are brought to our doors. We have it all around us. And it were perhaps not an unprofitable inquiry to calculate how much actual outlay might be saved by the superior sanative condition of the poor—how many of those diseases, (taking their rise in dirt, and obstructed perspiration, and in that large class of rheumatic affections which could have been entirely avoided after the hardening process of regular bathing, commenced in early life and continued) which the public purse has directly or indirectly to pay for, could have been altogether staved off by the public baths. The more a person thinks of this, the clearer will be his convictions of the great sanative power of the bath, as a general aid to health among the laboring classes.

At present, however, we shall be fain to cry content with such excellent baths as this new one of Mr. Gray's; nor indeed could we desire a better under any circumstances. We wish the public could be persuaded into the most unanimous patronage of his place. And most likely, he is fast achieving that result. His arrangements are of a superior cast; the per-

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## WALT WHITMAN

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son whom, during his own absence, he leaves in charge, is a most civil and accommodating man; and there is a female for the service of the ladies, in their department.

To young men—particularly to heads of families having children—a family of boys—do we advise the procurement of a season ticket to this excellent bath. How many of the fine promising lads who are yearly drowned in this neighborhood, would have been saved, if they were furnished with bathing accommodations in the way we advise. It is a fine noble sport, to dash in the cool waters, of a hot summer day! a sport specially grateful to the young.—Mr. Gray's bath has always been recommendable, too, as being patronised by the most respectable of our Brooklyn families—and therefore affording no objections to parents, in the way of dangerous companionship for their children.

[Whitman himself was a regular patron of Mr. Gray's "Swimming Bath" during the period of his editorship of *The Eagle*. William H. Sutton, still living (1920) at the age of

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## “THE ART OF HEALTH”

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ninety, was “printer’s devil” in The *Eagle* office when Whitman was editor. Whitman took a great fancy to young Sutton, and according to the latter it was his custom to go to Gray’s Bath every day around noon-time, after he had finished his work in the office, for a swim. He always took young Sutton with him and would stay in the water exactly twenty minutes, after which Sutton was supposed to work the pump to give him a shower. Whitman would then go off to New York or elsewhere leaving Sutton at the bath. Whitman told Horace Traubel, July 20, 1888: “I was never what you would call a skillful swimmer, but was quite good. I always hugely enjoyed swimming. My forte was—if I can say it that way—in floating. . . . I was a first-rate aquatic loafer.” “With Walt Whitman in Camden.”]

*July 23, 1846*

### BROOKLYN YOUNG MEN.—ATHLETIC EXERCISES

IN our sun-down perambulations, of late, through the outer parts of Brooklyn, we have

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## WALT WHITMAN

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observed several parties of youngsters playing "base," a certain game of ball. We wish such sights were more common among us. In the practice of athletic and manly sports the young men of nearly all our American cities are very deficient—perhaps more so than those of any other country that could be mentioned. Clerks are shut up from early morning till nine or ten o'clock at night—apprentices, after their day's work, either go to bed, or lounge about in places where they benefit neither body or mind—and all classes seem to act as though there were no commendable objects of pursuit in the world except making money, and tenaciously sticking to one's trade or occupation. Now, as the fault is so generally of this kind, we can do little harm in hinting to people that, after all, there may be no necessity for such a drudge system among men. Let us enjoy life a little. Has God made this beautiful earth—the sun to shine—all the sweet influences of nature to operate—and planted in man a wish for their delights—and all for nothing? Let us go forth awhile, and get better air in our lungs. Let us leave our close

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## “THE ART OF HEALTH”

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rooms, and the dust and corruption of stagnant places, and taste some of the good things Providence has scattered around us so liberally.

We would that all the young fellows about Brooklyn were daily in the habit of spending an hour or two in some out-door game or recreation. The body and mind would both be benefitted by it. There would be fewer attenuated forms and shrunken limbs and pallid faces in our streets. The game of ball is glorious—that of quoits is invigorating—so are leaping, running, wrestling, etc., etc. To any person having the least knowledge of physiology, it were superfluous to enter into any argument to prove the use and benefit of exercise. We have far too little of it in this country, among the “genteel” classes. Both women and men, particularly the younger ones, should be careful to pass no day of their lives without a portion of out-door exercise.

## SHORT EDITORIALS

*January 10, 1848*

### TEN MINUTES IN THE ENGINE ROOM OF A BROOKLYN FERRY BOAT

CROSSING the Fulton ferry the other evening we were invited by a friend, of engineering accomplishments, to walk down in the engine room. This is a place, doubtless, which very few of the thousands of passengers who cross the ferry ever visit. But it is an almost sublime sight that one beholds there; for indeed there are few more magnificent pieces of handiwork than a powerful steam-engine, swiftly at work! . . . We do not profess to understand the tricks—or rather the simplicities—of machinery, as evinced in one of these boats; so that the reader need look for no allusion of a scientific nature in this paragraph. At one end is the fiery region of living heat, the roaring, glowing coals, which look like a small edition of the infernal regions. The

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## SHORT EDITORIALS

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draft rumbles with a mighty hissing sound between a few little interstices; and through the mica plates, as through glass, one beholds a powerful mass of *hotness* quite terrible to look upon. It is enough to make a sinful man feel any other feeling on earth than that of a pleasurable anticipation.

Toward the other end moves up and down, (resistless as fate while it *does* move, and yet stopped by a turn of the finger,) the mighty arm of the engine! There is a strange gratification in standing and looking on this ponderous bar in motion. It makes one think that man—he who can invent such powers as this—is not such an insignificant creature after all. All the immense power of this able-to-kill-and-destroy structure is controlled by a couple of men, who stop it or set it going as easily as a child rolls his hoop.

*December 31, 1847*

### NEW YEAR'S DAY

SOON after this edition of The Brooklyn *Eagle* is circulated among its readers, the

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WALT WHITMAN

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"New Year"—the reign of '48—will commence: one of those dividers of time will be passed, and the world fairly afloat on the fresh tide. Many dry homilies are customary about these times. The importance of "good resolutions," and of "turning over a new leaf," are duly expatiated upon—and the ladies set out their tables preparatory to receiving New Year calls. . . . Eighteen hundred and forty-seven! thus many years have sped over the earth, since the commencement of the Christian era! And with all the before alluded to "good resolutions," people are just as wicked as ever; and with all the changes, mother Earth is pretty much the same old two and sixpence. Customs, dress, government, and so forth, have differed at various times, and differ now; but human nature is about what it was before the flood, and before the "dark ages," and during them too.

Is there nothing, then, in all these vaunted reforms of us moderns? in this much boasted "intelligence of the age"? Yes: though they do not change man, nor his passions. | The religion of Christ is incomparably superior to

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## SHORT EDITORIALS

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all other religions—though it cannot make man essentially different.] All reforms tend to the great result of freeing man's body and his mind from the dark tyranny, in some shape or other, that has been accumulating on them for centuries. They perform more the labor of hewing away than adding to.

We enjoin upon our readers, young and old, feminine and masculine, married and single, by all means to make themselves as "happy" as is consistent with reason, this nigh-at-hand New Year's Day.

*July 14, 1846*

### PROMOTION FROM THE RANKS

THE idea of "promotion from the ranks," is a sound Democratic idea! We can conceive of no innovation on the foolish old Army discipline—and Navy discipline, too—which were more likely to inspirit the *masses* of our forces to the performance of almost superhuman things! In the splendid battles on the Rio Grande, amid the high honor justly accorded to the General and officers, it should not be

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WALT WHITMAN

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forgotten, (it *is* not forgotten by the commander himself,) that the private soldiers bore the brunt of the shock: *they* withstood the charge of superior force, and *they* gained the day in truth. And what objection is there to promotion from the ranks? Immediately after the mightiest victories of Napoleon—*amid* those victories even—when he promoted even the commonest soldier for uncommon daring and coolness—he threw abroad in his army that fiery enthusiasm which bore every thing before them! Ah, *he* understood human nature! It is not the mere physical force, or even the drilling, of a military phalanx, that makes it invincible. And it always seems singular to us that such things are forgotten—not so much by military men, themselves, perhaps, as by the higher civil power which directs their movements.

[“The whole present system of the officering and personnel of the Army and Navy of these States, and the spirit and letter of their trebly-aristocratic rules and regulations, is a monstrous exotic, a nuisance and revolt, and be-

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## SHORT EDITORIALS

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long here just as much as orders of nobility, or the Pope's council of cardinals." "Democratic Vistas."]

*December 24, 1846*

"A MERRY CHRISTMAS" WISHES THE *Eagle* TO  
ITS READERS (IN ADVANCE)

"GLORY to God in the highest, and on earth Peace, Good-will toward men!" sang the Angel Annunciator more than eighteen centuries ago—sang in the ears of a world that amid an *intellectual* development greater in some things than has ever been seen since, yet knew not the beauty and moral grandeur of this new proclamation! "Fear not," said the same heavenly visitant, "for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people." Then Christ, the Pure Paragon, was born and laid in a manger. Then vitality started in manifold seeds of true good which had for ages lain dormant in humanity. Ah, Thou whose office it was "to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of Peace,"

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WALT WHITMAN

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how the hearts of the children of men yet turn to Thy soothing counsels; and how refreshing to know that the same founts of consolation at which we drink, have been tasted by the now dead and past ages, and still by thousands and thousands every day! \* \* \*

—A Merry Christmas! wishes The Brooklyn *Eagle* to every one whom it knows—and whom it don't know too, for that matter. Merry not in the smaller sense of sensual vivacity, but in the larger one of a satisfied conscience, health, and a “happy state of mind.”

*November 9, 1846*

#### THE “DOMESTIC CIRCLE”

WHATEVER may be the cares and mishaps of married life, it is probably undeniable that “if there’s bliss to be found on the earth,” (a questionable find!) it must be in the domestic circles. Think of this, bachelors! as the “best and greatest” men, have settled it to be a fact! . . . The bad thing is, that people see the worst phases of married life—as those are apt to make themselves prominent; while the real

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## SHORT EDITORIALS

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quiet enjoyment—the true coy comfort, that loves to nestle in quiet—“make no declarations for the public eye.” How many blissful hours must be spent by fathers, in the blessedness of the mere *presence* of affectionate children! How much of happiness is going on—(a cheerful thought that almost cancels the sad evidence of misery we see towering on every side!)—that is dreamed of by no mortal mind—seen by no mortal eye—except the few participants in it. . . .

*July 2, 1846*

### GOD'S CHILDREN'S PROPERTY

As rich fellows, (before now,) have often been perplexed with their ponderous estates—we shouldn't wonder if the United States Government, ere many years, becomes sadly bothered with its immense *public lands*. Every year is adding to the value of these lands. In time, they could—if retained—make the government richer than any other on earth.

But they must *not* be retained! We do not

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## WALT WHITMAN

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want a rich government. We dread such a consummation. We had far rather have a rich average population—by which we mean a population possessing a moderate competence, either through the soil, or elsewhere. There would be more poison diffused through the political movements and offices of the country by a perpetually full Treasury, than by any other means on earth!

The government would do wisely, then, if it still increased the encouragements and facilities to settlers on the public lands. All the use and profit in owning that territory, is, for the benefit of God's children *who need it*. Are there not plenty of such children? Look around you!

Congress has this matter now before it; and we do trust and desire that somebody will be found honest enough to tell the plain truths, and portray the proper course, (even if it subject him to the awful nickname of "radical,") on this matter of a property which the rulers of the land merely hold in trust for the poor, after all. In the Senate, Mr. Calhoun's proposition on the Public Lands is as follows: It

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## SHORT EDITORIALS

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proposes that all lands which on the 1st of March, 1847, have been offered for sale for ten years, shall then be offered at \$1.00 per acre until 1st March, 1850, then the remainder at 75 cents till the 1st March, 1853; the remainder at 50 cents till 1st March, 1856; and the remainder until 1st of March, 1859, at 25 cents per acre. All those remaining unsold to be ceded to the States in which they lie. It provides for the application of the same principle to the other lands as they remain ten years unsold. It gives pre-emption rights to actual settlers, and prohibits any sale of more than one section to any person at the reduced rates of 50 and 25 cents per acre.

We shall watch the progress of this thing narrowly; and we have more to say about it.

*October 7, 1846*

### INDULGENT NATURE

SEEMS disposed to bless us with a lingering taste of her most sweetest bestowal, in the way

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## WALT WHITMAN

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of weather, before she closes up her summer accounts, and does business in the way of "hard times," frost and snow. Surely no mortal man could ask for finer weather than this now current. The air has a springiness and buoyance about it—the sky wafts but a few light clouds—and the sun gives us all his goodly warmth, without any of the unpleasant vividness erewhile of the dog-days. . . . This is the weather for taking long walks in the country—for strolling out, not to kill an hour, or stave off vacuity—but to enjoy Life and Nature—to receive into the heart the thousand refining and indescribably sweet influences that this beautiful earth, in its more agreeable phases, presents. The Autumn exhibits features which have been harped upon by the poets, and painted by painters, for ages.—But the theme can never become stale —for it is rooted in the roots of trees, and blooms freshly in their perpetual bloom—lives in the gorgeous tints of the sky, and in the mellow haze of the autumn air—and smiles forever on the bright cool surface of the rivers.

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## SHORT EDITORIALS

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*October 2, 1847*

### MUSIC AT MIDNIGHT

SOME very smooth and pleasant music made vocal that neighborhood of Prince street between Willoughby and Myrtle avenue, last evening. The clear twang of a "light guitar" accompanied by several voices, a falsetto among the rest, discoursed many good pieces. The music and songs were of foreign birth "very choice Italian" for what we know. Of a certes, however, we know that we were much pleased with the same, and take this opportunity, for want of a better, to present our grateful thanks for the compliment. In the small hours of the night, amid the hushed air, such harmony was refreshing indeed.

*November 25, 1846*

### [THANKSGIVING DAY]

AND so to-morrow is Thanksgiving Day! But how few there are who will fully hold it in that spirit of gratitude which may well be observed from man to his Maker, in such a

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## WALT WHITMAN

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beautiful world as this is, after all—that spirit of “thanks for life and thanks for death,” so properly a guiding motive in the health-toned mind! Whatever may have befallen us, whatever may have happened in the past year, no mortal being but has cause for praise to God! Has it been well with thee? Then praise the good Benevolence which has vouchsafed so much mercy. Has thy life been darkened with grief, or any great troubles? Bow thy head to the good Father, “who doth all things well;” sorrow if thou must, in meekness—but sorrow not as one who has no hope, for does not thy Father live and wield power still? Nor let thy sorrow be so undetermined as to debar a cheerful demeanor for *one day* at least; let thy heart respond to the good that has been ordained for thee too.

We say these words, (although of a more sober hue than may seem fitting to the time,) because we know that the merry will need no prompting to hold such a day as to-morrow: it is the cast down who need that prompting. Yet undeveloped is that soul which has not known sorrow.

## WHITMAN AS A PARAGRAPHER

April 24, 1847

### REMINISCENCES OF THE SLAVE TRADE

IN 1811 there was a slave-market in full operation in Wall street. *Yankee Doodle* often thinks he still hears the whip and the groans of the victims as he goes through this famous locality. Indeed, there are as many slaves there as ever, only they belong to one master —the——whew!

August 18, 1846

### YES YOU HAVE!

IF you trade on borrowed capital and squander the profits of your business in "riotous living," and finally fail, you have only to charge the failure to the new Tariff law, curse the Administration, and set up for a Whig electioneerer.

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WALT WHITMAN

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August 18, 1846

QUIN WAS RIGHT!

QUIN being asked by a lady why it was reported that there were more women in the world than men, he replied, "It is in conformity with the arrangements of nature, madam: we always see more of heaven than of earth."

August 27, 1846

MORE HOTTENTOT IGNORANCE!

THE *Tribune* cannot understand, and asks us to tell it, how many L. I. eels it can get for a shilling. Every body that "knows eels" at all (which not to know argues one a noodle,) is well enough aware that from Shewango neck to Hog Inlet, twelve and a half cents is equivalent to a *mess* of that savory edible. . . . We call upon both the Whig print and the *Morning News* to put their readers right on this important subject.

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## WHITMAN AS A PARAGRAPHER

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*June 6, 1847*

### PAUCITY OF NEWS

NEVER were matters in the news line duller than they are today.

*October 25, 1847.*

### [THE WEATHER]

YESTERDAY was a dull, damp, dirty, drizzly, disagreeable day—one that draws the line very distinctly between foul and fair weather Christians.—The latter, we understand, devoted themselves very assiduously to their domestic concerns.

*October 15, 1847*

### THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED

ALL through the morning, the same heavy and thick fog has continued to envelope this section of the world.—Ding-g-g! ding-g-g! ding-g-g! go the ferry bells to give the boats notice where they must come in.

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## WALT WHITMAN

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*January 4, 1848*

### LADIES' CALLS

EVEN our editorial sanctum was honored, yesterday, (3d) with ladies' calls. Weren't we a happy set? . . . Heaven bless the ladies.

*August 19, 1847*

### PEACHES AND COURTESY

WE received a handsome lot of beautiful peaches from our contemporary of the Brooklyn *Advertiser*, this morning. The looks of the fruit were beautiful and the taste is sublime; as we, and all our "boys" can testify.

*May 12, 1847*

### VULGAR AND BRUTAL AFFAIR

THE prize fight between Caunt and Sullivan came off on Tuesday morning at 9 o'clock, at Harper's Ferry. Seven rounds were fought in twelve minutes; Sullivan winning from the start. A wrangle ensued, but the referee gave

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## WHITMAN AS A PARAGRAPHER

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his decision in favor of Sullivan. Caunt is badly beaten. A most disgusting piece of work.

*April 19, 1847*

### OUR NEW PRESS

ABOUT as pretty and clean-working a piece of machinery as a man might wish to look on, (with all the "latest improvements,") is in the shape of our new napier press—to go by steam or other power—which puts on its bib and tucker and makes its first bow before us this morning. The dull rub-a-dub shakes our table from the room below while we write; and if the new mint that *is* to be in New York, would only toss off Eagles as fast as it tosses them, Mr. Benton's "golden dream" might not be so much of a chimera, after all. . . . This press (Taylor, maker,) is truly a magnificent piece of workmanship, as far as we can yet judge. As a temporary inconvenience, however, from our folks not being yet used to it, a portion of our subscribers will get their papers printed in a wry manner.

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WALT WHITMAN

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*March 25, 1847*

“IMPROVED PRESSES”

UNDER this head, a milliner in New York advertises a new kind of corsets, that “wind up with a windlass.”

*June 17, 1847*

RECEIVED WITH THANKS

A pretty bouquet from Bob.

*January 6, 1847*

“IN THE TWINKLING OF AN EYE”—MR.  
YOUNG’S FIRST MESSAGE

THE Governor’s message, which we publish today, was transmitted, (5000 words) from Albany to New York yesterday (5th) by magnetic telegraph, after 12 o’clock, and was in type, printed, and for sale in Brooklyn and New York, by 4 o’clock! . . . We reserve comments upon the M. till another day.

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## WHITMAN AS A PARAGRAPHER

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*December 23, 1846*

### WILL WE NEVER HAVE ANY BETTER STATE OF THINGS?

THERE is not a fact which can bring more irrefragable evidence to prove itself, than that the Post Office Department of the United States is the most mismanaged “concern” of any general institution in the world! It is a living oration and argument against the power of the government to compete with individual enterprise and quick-sightedness against the results of the monopolizing spirit. . . . But even as it is, the P. O. *might* be a great deal better. The present P. M. G. is not fit for his station. We want an active Yankee—a fellow who is “up to the age”—at the head of that Department.

*January 15, 1847*

### PAY OF SOLDIERS

IF we are to have war, the common soldiers, the *working-men* of the army, should be well paid. *They should have tracts assigned them*

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## WALT WHITMAN

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*from the government lands at the West.* Let us brethren of the Press! let us help this project. . . .

*June 12, 1846*

Our friend of the *Tribune* saith:

The Brooklyn *Eagle*, after mentioning a beautiful bouquet, which he affects to believe must have been made up by "female taste," says—"Close upon the heels of this comes another," etc. Barbarian! A bouquet with heels would be a pretty figure!

—We confess the phrase won't bear criticism; but still it is not so *very* bad. At all events it is no worse than to talk of the "twang," (a sharp sudden noise,) of "a bowl of sour cream!" as the *Tribune* does in the paragraph immediately before that about our bouquet.

*October 29, 1846*

Our Whig friends have repudiated their matrimonial contract with the Natives, the *Advertiser* had an editorial yesterday. "Who wants a wife?" . . . Not we Democrats,

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## WHITMAN AS A PARAGRAPHER

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good Sir Whig! the blushing feminine has lost not only her chastity, but she "won't pay," as you yourself complained erewhile.

*April 3, 1846*

J. J. Astor has given \$500 to the Fund for Firemen's widows and orphans. How on earth could he spare it?

*August 12, 1846*

What do you think, Sir Reader, when we tell you that three ladies' slippers were "pulled off" and bestowed upon us this morning. We have 'em now—in a glass of water!

*August 21, 1846*

Carelessly knocking a man's eye out with a broken axe, may be termed a *bad axe-i-dent*.

*August 26, 1846*

When is that editorial dinner to come off? We are getting hungry.—*Brooklyn Advertiser*.  
—The old joke is not a bad one about the

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WALT WHITMAN

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corporal's wife saying to the general's lady,—  
“We officers' wives ought to dine by ourselves.”

*July 20, 1847*

Don't attempt to be too fine in speaking. Use good honest English, and common words for common things. If you speak of breeches, shirt, or petticoats, call them by their right names. The vulgarity is in avoiding them.

*February 16, 1847*

The Brooklyn *Eagle* “begs leave to state” that this is one of the dullest days it has ever experienced. A flat turgidity seems to pervade every thing. Leaden clouds cover the heavens—the air is bitter and raw—there ain’t any news—and B. E. is not i’ the vein for knitting editorials, at all.

*February 5, 1847*

The Brooklyn *Eagle*, devils inclusive, (the name whereof is legion,) had high times yesterday, feasting on, plum and pound cake,

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## WHITMAN AS A PARAGRAPHER

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sent, to the B. E. with a certain marriage notice. The devils—in view of said cake—say it would be a blessed thing if every body got married every day. Such a sentiment is worthy of the wickedest sort of devils!

*February 4, 1847*

Young man reader! if you have good health, are over twenty-one years old, and nothing to “incumber” you, go and get married.



## **Part VI**

**LITERATURE, BOOK REVIEWS,  
DRAMA, ETC.**



## AMERICAN LITERATURE

February 10, 1847

### INDEPENDENT AMERICAN LITERATURE

SEVERAL of the papers—among the rest *Yankee Doodle*—took us to task, not long since, for some strictures on an incident which occurred at the anniversary dinner of the Hamilton Association, in this city. One of the guests at that dinner proposed a toast involving an assertion of American literary independence—which was partially hissed, *not* by any member of the Hamilton Society, however, but by some other guest or guests. (In our former brief notice, certain words were used which we are now convinced did injustice to this really talented band of young men; they are, many of them gentlemen of much literary taste, and true perception.) *Yankee Doodle* thinks not only that the toast was very properly hissed, but that instead of mere hissing, the hearers should

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WALT WHITMAN

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have hooted its author from the room. This horrible toast, was in the following words: "The United States of America—an independent country, and not a mere suburb of London." Truly a frightful and audacious sentiment! a most treasonable, rebellious toast! *Are* we not a "mere suburb of London?" We trow yes, as long as such sentiments as that of the hapless toast are condemned by a periodical whose very foundation starts in the idea of nationality—as long as we copy with a servile imitation, the very cast-off literary fashions of London—as long as we wait for English critics to stamp our books and our authors, before *we* presume to say they are very good or very bad—as long as the floods of British manufactured books are poured over the land, and give their color to all the departments of taste and opinion—as long as an American society, meeting at the social board, starts with wonder to hear any of its national names, or any national sentiment, mentioned in the same hour with foreign authors or foreign greatness. Yes, yes! the suggester of that toast *did* deserve to be

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## AMERICAN LITERATURE

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"hooted out of the room," for promulgating such a broad, impudent, unblushing falsehood—a sentiment whose untruth was made plain at the very moment of its utterance! The "United States an independent country"? Why, we are politically independent no doubt; but the United States are as much bound in mental bondage as ever—as much as Gulliver was bound by the Lilliputians. Here is this *Yankee Doodle*, now—a paper whose advent we praised, and to whom we have given our humble good word, because we thought it was going to espouse the side of American literary "independence"—even *it* derides the idea that America is not a "mere suburb of London!" Rare *Yankee Doodle*!

Let us not be mistaken by the reader. Not of the petty bigotted misnamed nationality is ours, which sees nothing to applaud, except it be of native birth. The world-wide stretch of Shakspere's genius—the true divinity of Spenser—all the varied graces and grandeurs and beauties of Milton, Bunyan, DeFoe,—of the elder dramatists and the great historians of England—are treasures to us Americans

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## WALT WHITMAN

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more precious than the treasures of kings; and we thank old England for them, with thanks next to what we render for that sturdy spirit of progress and independence, which is the *greatest* treasure a people can possess. Ah, those wonderful men! what godlike minds! what different beauties—so massive, so delicate, so richly florid, so chastely simple, so touching home to the scenes of life, so educive of otherwise hidden passions, so tender and so mighty!—Talk of the kings of kingdoms! *they* are the true kings of earth—the kings of the immeasurable realm of human hearts! . . . But it is because we enter into the realization of the highest phases of their development, that we are not content to live only on the strength of the aliment they have furnished. How the world has “spread itself” since their day! And have *we* in this country nothing to add to the store of their manifold genius? And will we fail to remember, too, that the genius of the Old World has shaped itself to a different state of things from what exists in the new? Are we not afraid that the thousand streams of literature which irrigate the West-

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## AMERICAN LITERATURE

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ern Continent will spread forever the qualities of the source whence they spring? To these questions freely and clearly we answer *no*.—With the most trustful confidence—for an ardent though humble believer—we have every faith in the eventual justice and perceptions of the American people. Removed on the one hand from the servile copyists who believe that under the portals of the past, and to the moping phantoms there, we must look for masters and for examples, and to pay our highest worship—and, on the other hand, from the officious thruster forward of the claims, in every ridiculous connection, of *writing that is merely American because it is not written abroad*—there is a true public opinion forming here which will ere long do equal and exact justice to all, in this matter.

[Whitman expressed this same idea in “Democratic Vistas” and elaborated upon it. It was the theme of an article in the *North American Review* in March, 1891, “American National Literature,” republished in “Good-Bye My Fancy,” and he expressed the same

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## WALT WHITMAN

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thought to Horace Traubel on August 12, 1888,  
“With Walt Whitman in Camden.”]

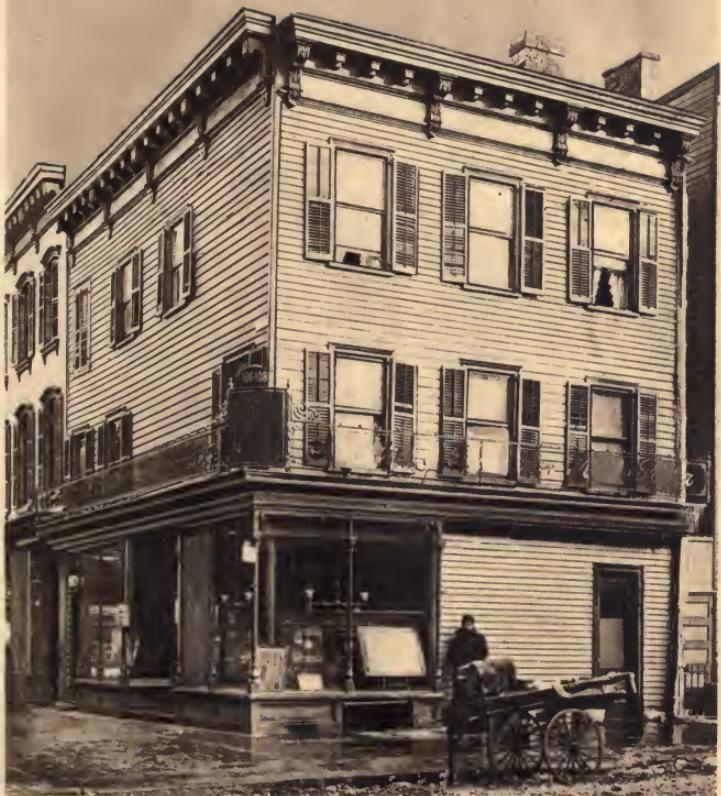
*July 11, 1846*

### “HOME” LITERATURE

HE who desires to see this noble Republic independent, not only in name, but in fact, of all unwholesome foreign sway, must ever bear in mind the influence of European literature over us—its tolerable amount of good, and its, we hope, “not to be endured” much longer, immense amount of evil.

That there is often some clap-trap in denunciations of English books, we have no disposition to deny.—But the evil generally leans on the other side. We receive with a blind homage whatever comes to us, stamped with the approbation of foreign critics—merely because *it is* so stamped. We have not enough confidence in our own judgments; we forget that God has given the American mind powers of analysis and acuteness superior to those possessed by any other nation on earth.

For the beautiful creations of the great in-





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## AMERICAN LITERATURE

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tellects of Europe—for the sweetness of majesty of Shakspere, Goethe, and some of the Italian poets—the fiery breath of Byron, the fascinating melancholy of Rousseau, the elegance and candor of Hume and Gibbon,—and much more beside—we of the Western World, bring our tribute of admiration and respect. Presumptuous and vain would it be for us to decry their glorious merits. But it must not be forgotten, that many of the most literary men of England are the advocates of doctrines that in such a land as ours are the rankest and foulest poison.—Cowper teaches blind loyalty to the “divine right of kings”—Johnson was a burly aristocrat—and many more of that age were the scorners of the common people, and pour adulation on the shrine of “Toryism.” Walter Scott, Croly, Alison, Southey, and many others well known in America, exercise an evil influence through their books, in more than one respect; for they laugh to scorn the idea of republican freedom and virtue.

And what perfect cataracts of trash come to us at the present day from abroad! The tinsel sentimentality of Bulwer is but a relief from

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## WALT WHITMAN

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the inflated, unnatural, high-life-below-stairs,—“historical” romances of Harrison Ainsworth. As to the vulgar coarseness of Marryatt, the dishwater senility of Lady Blessington, and the stuff (there is no better word)—of a long string of literary quacks, tapering down to the nastiness of the French Paul De Kock,—(who in reality has perhaps more talent than all the others put together—malgré his awfully murderous translations into English),—who can say they have any qualities which recommend them to that wide circulation they enjoy on this side of the Atlantic?

Let us be more just to ourselves and our good taste. Why, “Professor” Ingraham, and those—their name is legion—Misters and madames who write tales, (does anybody ever really read them through?) for the monthly magazines have quite as much genuine ability as these coiners of unwholesome reading from abroad!

But, “Where is the remedy?” says the inquisitive reader. *In ourselves* we must look, for it. Let those who read,—(and in this country who does not read?)—no more condescend to patronize an inferior foreign author,

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## AMERICAN LITERATURE

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when they have so many respectable writers at home. Shall Hawthorne get a paltry *seventy-five dollars* for a two volume work?—Shall real American genius shiver with neglect while the public run after this foreign trash? We hope, and we confidently expect, that the people of this land will come to their “sober second thought” upon the subject, and that soon.

*September 22, 1846*

### THE PEN

“WITHIN the hands of men entirely great,” said Forrest in his character of Cardinal Richelieu at the Park Theater, last night, “the *pen* is mightier than the sword!” This is a great truth, well expressed. . . . The ages of steel and of contending armies, and the smoke of battle, and the neighing of the war horse, have passed away.—Knights go forth no more, clad in the brazen armor, to redress the wrongs or the injury of the weak.—Barons, with their long trains of esquires and men-at-arms, no more are seen abroad in search of opportunities to show their valor and gain booty. The

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## WALT WHITMAN

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time of the fluttering of pennants in the breeze, while, "ladies faire" look down upon a sort of feudal boxing match, is also departed. And we are the gainers. . . . Where is, at this moment, the great medium or exponent of power, through which the civilized world is governed? Neither in the tactics or at the desks of statesmen, or in those engines of physical terror and force wherewith the game of war is now played. The *pen* is that medium of power—a little crispy goose quill, which, though its point can hardly pierce your sleeve of broadcloth, is able to make gaping wounds in mighty empires—to put the power of kings in jeopardy, or even chop off their heads—to sway the energy and will of congregated masses of men, as the huge winds roll the waves of the sea, lashing them to fury, and hurling destruction on every side! At this hour in some part of the earth, it may be, that the delicate scraping of a pen over paper, like the nibbling of little mice, is at work which shall show its results sooner or later in the convulsion of the social or political world. [Karl Marx?] Amid penury and destitution, un-

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## AMERICAN LITERATURE

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known and unnoticed, a man may be toiling on to the completion of a book destined to gain acclamations, reiterated again and again, from admiring America and astonished Europe! Such is the way, and such the magic of the pen. Quiet and without ostentation in the method of its workings, but as lasting as the eternal rocks and existing in its results when the fingers that moved it have withered to dust, and been forgotten for ages.

The season of contending armies, and of tournaments, we have said, is among things of the bygone. But the wrongs of nations, and the quarrels of injured weakness, are not without their champions. And though that champion be never called on to do battle with lance or broad sword, he can defend the right as well, and gain a victory as surely, as could the bravest noble of Coeur de Lion, or the closest copy of him, "without fear and without reproach." The proud oppressor, lording it over helpless worth, is made to tremble and turn pale when *the pen* holds up his atrocity to an indignant people. Cunning hypocrisy, its motives dark as its conduct, when exposed in all the horrors

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## WALT WHITMAN

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of vividly painted vice by *the pen*, writhes and twists in more than its merited agony. The sly rogue and the profligate, with brazen, hard face,—the betrayer of his trust, and the wily seducer—the monarch on the throne and the unprincipled legislator—the heartless parent and the unthankful child—the tyrannical captain of a crew, and the brutal whipper of a slave, all bend beneath the whirlwind of its wrath, and know its power to punish wickedness. None are so high that it dare not boldly confront them and pull them down. None are so low but it may perceive their vileness, and toss them aloft, high in the gaze of the multitude, and, as they fall, trample upon them, like the enraged elephant, until justice is satisfied.

*February 15, 1847*

ONE OF THE SACREDEST RIGHTS OF AN AMERICAN CITIZEN OUTRAGED—PUNISHMENT  
OF AN EDITOR FOR DARING TO  
SPEAK HIS MIND

THE Washington *Union* of the early part of last week had some sharp remarks on cer-

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## AMERICAN LITERATURE

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tain United States Senators—and on Saturday last, (13th) the United States Senate passed a vote expelling the editor of the W. U. from the Senate Chamber. Of old Mr. Ritchie we think not. Whether he and his be good, bad or indifferent, has little to do with the matter as it at present stands. The only point is, that the editor of a free press, in this free land, has been punished for speaking his free opinion—as he, we, or the reader must ever own the right to do, so long as our Constitution stands. This deed of the Senate is an outrage which should call forth an indignant thunder-roll of condemnation, from every man that loves the first principles of freedom and free discussion. It involves the greatest requisite of the safety of republican governments—for we hesitate not to say, that there could be no perpetuated liberty, in this country, if the principle on which the Senate have acted be justifiable, and be pursued. Once suppress the privilege—the privilege? the life-bought and blood-sealed and law-guarded *right!*—of the editors of papers to criticise the proceedings and votes of public bodies, partic-

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## WALT WHITMAN

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ularly legislative bodies, through the country—and the whole fabric of our government would fall in, as a house without a framework.

. . . Who dare say they are not amenable to editors? Not even the monarchs in England—or the church. And shall a legislative body—the servants of the people, in this Democratic land—assume that exclusiveness?

On the occasion of the debate which ended in this piece of tyrannical and most undignified spite, Senator Allen offered some sensible remarks for which the lovers of independent discussion might thank him—were it not that they state truths so plain, as to make one wonder why they should need a statement at all; which wonder is answered, however, by the after-action of the Senate itself. Mr. Allen denied the right of the legislative branch of the government to assume, under the name of privilege, any power not given to it by the Constitution. If Congress once began to censure the press, there could be no stopping place. If we censured an editor here, we might soon censure one in Baltimore or New Orleans; and if we assumed the right of

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censure, we would, by the next step, assume to punish by imprisonment. The question was whether the Senate could take cognizance of a libel. Each Senator had a recourse to the law as every other person had, for the protection of official reputation. He did not believe the Constitution would survive half a century if we muzzled the press. He had been as severe a sufferer personally from an unlicensed press as any one. He had seen fifteen hundred presses all at work at the business of agitation, with the aid of some thousands of phrenzied stump orators;—and while many trembled for the safety of the very frame work of our institutions, he hailed it rather as a proof of its stability. Mr. Allen would have nothing to say of the offense given by the editor in this case; for however aggravated it might be, it did not affect the argument. The pretext of guarding the dignity of the Senate would depend upon its acts, and was beyond the reach of libellers. In no contest of this sort could the Senate gain anything; for public opinion would always take the side of an individual against an organized body. We now wait

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## WALT WHITMAN

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with some curiosity and not a little impatience, to see what the “voice of the press” through the scope of the country will be—and whether the Senate itself will not have a “sober second thought.”

*January 14, 1847*

[HORACE GREELEY “BURNT IN EFFIGY”]

THE editor of the New York *Tribune* [Horace Greeley] was burnt in effigy last night, before his own office, at which groans, etc. were cast, by certain exuberant gentlemen. Brooklyn *Eagle* denounces many—perhaps most—opinions of the *Tribune*; but in this country the liberty of thought and expression is sacred; and no power on earth—President, king, party or mob—nothing but the *law* (when he outrages it,) has the right to attempt *forcible* measures for restraining the conduct of a free press, in this free country, from writing and printing as *he* thinks meet. . . . Once give in this constitution-guarded right—one of the dearest which an American citizen enjoys—and we shall all come to a pretty how-d'e-do,

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*February 26, 1847*

### TONE OF THE AMERICAN PRESS.—PERSONALITY

IT is of course very important for the public to know all about the personal differences and quarrels that occur between literary men, and also their manners and "notions"—whether A. eats roast beef or Graham bread, and whether he understands a given Scripture text this way or that way. It is a serious thing to the people that B. talks through his nose, and pronounces "curious" as though it were spelled without the i. Also how grave a subject for newspaper comment that C. or D. or E. holds certain doctrines which his neighbors do not hold, in metaphysics or in something else. Scurrility—the truth may as well be told—is a sin of the American newspaper press. It has degraded our journals, and by consequence our literature, in the minds of many sensible and worthy persons in Europe. And here at home it has deeply injured the editorial profession; newspaper writing and police pettifogging are often supposed to be in

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offensively close proximity. What ridiculous quarrels are often paraded through column after column, in the prints of the Gomorrah over the river! What family disputes—what insipid attempts at satire—what vile insinuations—blacken their pages almost every day! Every political print, especially, seems to think itself in duty bound to eject all the virulence it can gather in any shape, upon the character, conduct, names and personal attributes of its opponents. . . . This is very unwise, even upon considerations of policy. Abuse is the worst means of conversion in the world. And when there are so many great principles for political writers to investigate—so much that may be said upon law, government, and the thousand occurrences that are passing about us—and so wide a field for discussion in the relative bearing of party doctrines—we are surprised indeed that any print can give up the smallest portion of its space to these senseless combats. We wonder that men can take such pains to behave at the dinner table or in the drawing room with perfect decorum, and keep all their egotism and vulgarity for the

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public. Great force in the daily writer is highly desirable—but force does not consist in a foul mouth.

*September 17, 1846*

### AUTHORS

IT seems that American authors are not only to be kept out of their due by the denial of an international copyright law—but that they are to be fleeced finely! We should like to know what shadow of right Congress or any other power in this country has, to pass a law that the maker or owner of a book, (as much his sole and exclusive property as the carpenter's wages, or the M. C.'s salary) *shall* give without pay, a copy of his book to Congress, for the Smithsonian library! This law is an outrage and a meanness—and the utterers of it should be properly lashed by the press every where. It is not the price of the book—the half dollar or the one, two or three dollars—but the *principle* of the thing.—That principle involves an unconstitutionality; and if it be allowable in this instance, it may just

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as well be carried out into other things. Why should not every manufacturer of cottons be compelled to send a piece of each new pattern —of cloths, cassimeres, and fancy woolen goods, pieces of theirs, to a stated depot, in the same way? The principle is just as right, in that method of its operation.

*Tuesday Evening, March 10, 1846*

### Boz AND HIS NEW PAPER

MR. DICKENS' lately established paper, the *London News*, appears to be as full of merit as it is of matter. The enlarged views which it takes on all subjects—the generous sympathy for humanity—the high tone, without grossness, spite, or balderdash—with its emphatic advocacy of *free trade*—mark it beyond all others published in England as *the* Democratic newspaper of that country.

There are few things that ever filled us with more regret than Dickens' book on America. It is so hard to be misjudged and misunderstood by one you love! It is so hard that a man high above his fellows in the impulses of

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Literary Democracy (if we may use that phrase) should fail in seeing the *whole* truth about us, and not merely a few of the evil points alone! But we are inclined to think that Dickens himself is now sorry for writing that book. It indeed almost always happens that a man feels ashamed, after giving way to a fit of spleen, malignance, or anger. Let it be forgiven and forgotten! Let the service Boz has done to that most enlarged kind of Democracy—loving mankind—be a make weight and a cloak for his treatment towards us. We can well afford to forgive him; for the shafts passed from us as paper pellets from a statue! The *News* exemplifies the truth that the choice intellect of the world is staunch for the Democratic movement. Such prints are a tower of strength even to our cause in America.

*March 9, 1847*

### HONOR TO LITERATURE!

IN the Old Hemisphere, there are some world-famed piles of yet-entire architecture,

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which—though passed upon by “public opinion” as complete—were intended by their projectors to form but parts of a still more stupendous design. We could not help thinking, as analogous to the structures we have mentioned, the book D’Israeli’s *Amenities of Literature*—that standard even of our bookish time; (Harpers pub., fourth Am. edition.) It seems to have been—indeed was—the intention of the author to have made a complete history of literature—and the after circumstances which prevented the fulfillment of that intention, painful enough in themselves, are far more painful when it is considered what the world has lost through them. But even what the world has lost, makes perhaps more valuable what is left of the treasure. . . . The “Amenities” commence with the dawn of the intellectual light in Britain, as far as anything about it is known—with the Druidical institutions.—And the after pages show the deep research of the writer—his enthusiastic love of his subject—his faculty of order, too—for the whole chain is in consistent and harmonious connection. While reading the

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book, one cannot help being struck with, How much the world is indebted to literature, and literary men! how nearly all that has advanced humanity has been advanced by them! how *they* have been the conservators of that depth of virtue which consists not in abstractions, but in realities! how the fires of good impulses which seemed to have gone out, in many and many an age in the past, have secretly been cherished by them and opened again at the first fair chance! how the pleasant things of life have been scattered, and the sorrows of life ameliorated, and the roughness of life smoothed, and manliness encouraged, and meanness rebuked, by them! Through the long dreary stretch of periods which the lover of his race fain would turn from, the silver rein of literature alone, and what it carries with it, sparkle like a brook athwart a barren moor. . . . Such reflections teaches this book: and if it had not, though it has, manifold merits, that would entitle it to the good will of all who duly appreciate and "revere the humanities."

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## WALT WHITMAN

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*September 1, 1846*

MR. BRYANT

THE morning papers mention that Wm. Cullen Bryant has returned, well and refreshed, from his long and circuitous tour. We improve the occasion of mentioning this fact, to mention something more. . . . Sometimes, walking across the Park in New York, or along one of the thoroughfares of the city, you may meet a plainly dressed man of middling size, considerably beyond the younger age of life, with rather bloodless complexion, sparse white hair, and expressive quiet grey eyes. Of this description is William Cullen Bryant—a poet who, to our mind, stands among the first in the world. (American criticism is given to superlatives, and it is provoking that when merit does deserve and receive the highest praise, it gets no more than has been put to presumptuous literary quacks.) It is an honor and a pride to the Democratic party that it has such a man to conduct one of its principal newspapers—to be an expounder of its doctrines, and act as

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one of the warders to watch the safety of the citadel.

We have called Bryant one of the best poets in the world! This smacks so much of the exaggerated that we are half a mind to alter it, true as we sincerely believe it to be. But we will let it stand. We know that a prophet has but little fame in his own country, and that there are among us [those] who think no author's worth established till he has been endorsed by European approval. Bryant, indeed, has been thus endorsed. Moreover, there will come a time when the writings of this beautiful poet shall attain their proper rank—a rank far higher than has been accorded to them by many accomplished men, who think of them by no means disparagingly. We allude to such as, like the critic of American poetry in the *Democratic Review*, place Mr. Bryant "not in the first, or second, but in the third or fourth rank." . . . Foreign appreciation of American literary talent is sometimes truer than native.

[Whitman never altered his judgment as to Bryant. On October 25, 1888, he

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## WALT WHITMAN

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said to Horace Traubel, "Of late days I have put Bryant first of the four (American poets): Bryant, Emerson, Whittier, Longfellow, in that order."—"With Walt Whitman in Camden."]

*October 8, 1846*

### BARON VON RAUMER

WE have lately been reading for the second time, Von Raumer's "America" published last summer in New York by the Langleys. The Baron Von Raumer seems to be a man of note in his own country—a traveller of experience, and author of numerous works, of a historic, scientific and miscellaneous description.—His account of the United States will aid the great advancement of freedom abroad, in the same way as a giant may be aided by washing his eyes when they are dim and see blindly. So many works have been written by foreigners, abusive of America, and questioning the soundness of our institutions, that the very people abroad themselves were perplexed whether men ought to trust the light that

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lives within them, and look not to extrinsic aid in government. One single work like "America" baffles and backs the waves of detraction. It is a rock immovable in the sea; and though it may not dash the angry waves all down again, it is the foundation where a light house stands, a beacon and an illumination to all who come in its neighborhood. We must not forget before concluding our notice, that there are some small matters in which this intelligent German is altogether too easy with us. We by no means relish flattery for our national vices—and we have plenty of them. As a turner aside of the sneers and falsehoods of our distant libellers, it is perhaps well that the work is so strong in our favor. But here at home it will do no harm to remember that we have not by any means reached perfection. The abuse has prevailed so thoroughly in foreign accounts of us, however, that probably the baron has allowed himself deliberately to lean to the other side as far as possible. Heaven bless him for it! and heaven bless him, too, for his imperturbable good temper, which spreads through all he writes.

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*April 26, 1847*

ANTI-DEMOCRATIC BEARING OF SCOTT'S  
NOVELS

THE novels of Walter Scott are in some respects unsurpassed—but cannot be altogether praised.—This great writer delineates kings and queens and celebrated historic personages' more private life, perhaps even better where he excites every reader's profoundest sympathy by their losses, their defeats in war, or their severe calamities. Nor does he fail in a lower sphere. Who will not follow Jeanie Deans with every warm feeling on her adventurous journey to London? And upon the whole, we think the "Heart of Mid Lothian," the best of the great North Man's productions. Considered artistically it is certainly faultless; and judging by our own heart while reading it, (as we have done four or five times) there are no others more capable of deeply interesting the brain that peruses it.

But Scott was a Tory and a High Church and State man. The impression after reading any of his fictions where monarchs or nobles

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compare with patriots and peasants, is dangerous to the latter and favorable to the former. In the long line of those warriors for liberty, and those large hearted lovers of *men* before *classes* of men, which English history has recorded upon its annals, and which form for the fast anchored isle a far greater glory than her first Richard, or her tyrannical Stuarts, Scott has not thought one fit to be illustrated by his pen. In him as in Shakspere, (though in a totally different method) "there's such divinity does hedge a king," as makes them something more than mortal—and though this way of description may be good for poets or loyalists, it is poisonous for freemen. The historical characters of Scott's books, too are not the characters of truth. He frequently gets the shadow on the wrong face. Cromwell, for instance, was in the main, and even with severe faults, a heroic champion of his countrymen's rights—and the young Stuart was from top to toe a licentious, selfish, deceitful, and unprincipled man, giving his fastest friends to the axe and his subjects to plunder, when a spark of true manly nerve

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## WALT WHITMAN

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would have saved both. · But the inference to be drawn from Scott's representation of these two men makes a villain a good natured pleasant gentleman, and the honest ruler a blood-seeking hypocrite! Shame on such truckling! It is a stain black enough, added to his atrocious maligning of Napoleon, to render his brightest excellence murky!

[In "Democratic Vistas" Whitman elaborated the idea of European literature's anti-democratic influence, and in "Poetry Today in America" he names Scott as one who exhaled "that principle of caste which we Americans have come on earth to destroy." However, he valued Scott highly and read him up to his last days.]

*August 18, 1846*

### MISS [FREDERIKA] BREMER'S NOVELS

MUCH has been said, (and a good deal of nonsense withal,) on the subject of novel-reading. "It is destructive to the strength of the mind," cries one. "No," rejoins another,

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"it elevates and refines the mind." Actuated by the former belief, parents and guardians rigorously exclude works of fiction from their houses, and enjoin their young charges to abstain altogether from the perusal of them. On the other hand, the disciples of the second doctrine are too apt to be indiscriminate both in their own novel-reading and in their indulgence to others. They open the sluice much wider than is needful; and in the great rushing of the current come out not only health-giving drops, but mud and slime, and, haply poisonous reptiles.

Not a whit less than half the imaginative books published in this country are totally unworthy of praise either for their style or their intrinsic merit.—The time is worse than lost that is spent in perusing them. Crude and aimless in design—or rather without any design at all—they neither depict manners, or life, or natural passion. Witless are they, and if long reflection discovers some shadow of a moral, it has hardly enough point to "vex the dull ear of a drowsy man."

And yet there are many novels which can be

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read, and profit reaped from them. We particularly allude to Miss Bremer's novels, as translated by Mary Howitt. These charming works, making no pretensions to great intellectual merit, are probably, taking them altogether, the best books the whole range of romance-writing can furnish. The stories are unusually full of interest, and the reader retains his anxiety to know what is coming, till the very last page. The affected sentimentality of Bulwer, and the verbose weakness of [G. P. R.] James, are not the fault of this sweet authoress. If she has, indeed, any fault, it is that in one or two of her novels there is a little infusion of transcendentalism; but we can easily pardon it, for it can do no great harm. The mild virtues—how charity and forbearance and love are potent in the domestic circle—how each person can be a kingdom of happiness to himself—how indulgence in stormy passions leads invariably to sorrow—and depicting in especial the character of *a good, gentle mother*—these are the points upon which Miss Bremer labors like some divine painter, who revels in his art, and

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whose work is in a double sense, a work of love. Honor and glory to Peace! and double glory to all who inculcate Peace, whether among nations, politics or families!

If we ever have children, the first book after the New Testament, (with reverence we say it) that shall be made their household companion—a book whose spirit shall be infused in them as sun-warmth is infused in the earth in spring—shall be Miss Bremer's novels. We know nothing more likely to melt and refine the human character—particularly the young character. In the study of the soul—portraits therein delineated—in their motives, actions, and the results of those actions—every youth, of either sex, will make some profitable application to his or her own case. How many Petreas, how many young Cornets, how many Saras, there are, among the just-grown human beings around us! How the pure moonlight beauty of Elsie attracts the desire of every mother-reader to be likewise beautiful in her nature. And it were not unworthy of attention, that impressions of the true character of a parent, made upon the youthful, come forth

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in after years, when they are mothers and fathers. . . . We recommend every *family* to have a copy of these novels, as a household treasure.

[Miss Bremer was a famous Swedish novelist whose work was popular here. She visited the United States in 1849, and wrote a book on her impressions of America.]

*December 15, 1847*

[THE FIRST MENTION OF EMERSON]

IN one of Ralph Waldo Emerson's inimitable lectures, occurs the following striking paragraph, which every heart will acknowledge to be as truthful as it is beautiful:

When the act of reflection takes place in the mind, when we look at ourselves in the light of thought, we discover that our life is embosomed in beauty. Behind us, as we go, all things assume pleasing forms, as clouds do afar off. Not only things familiar and stale, but even the tragic and terrible, are lures of memory. The river bank, the weed at the water side, the old house, the foolish person, however neglected at the passing, have a grace in the past. Even the corpse that has

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lain in the chambers, has added a solemn ornament to the house.—The soul will not know either deformity or pain.

October 9, 1846

### “YANKEE DOODLE” COME

YES; *Yankee Doodle*—the much talked of, the anticipated, and much-canvassed in advance—has “come to town” at last. The worthy publisher, Graham, New York, has sent us a copy in advance—knowing probably that *we* could appreciate such a “good thing”; for *Yankee Doodle* is a good thing, and we, the public in general and editors in particular, must give it our hearty support. It is a print that outweighs in value the thousand-double of its intrinsic price. . . . The leader of *Yankee Doodle* is one of the most tasty and eloquent dove-tailings together of true American simplicity, humor, sincerity, good-heartedness, and depth of pathos too, that we have read for a long time. It settles the question with us that the influence of *Yankee Doodle* will be wielded in behalf of those good and

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great reforms—of dressing beautiful morals in fantastic drapery, and giving a pill of philosophy to what superficially is but the turn of a joke—which characterise its prototype on the other side of the Atlantic.—We therefore hail *Yankee Doodle* as a true and goodly laborer in the Field of Human Elevation—and though itself would be the first perhaps, to turn such a serious thought into a witticism, we look upon it as a sort of weekly preacher, winning and melting its readers to the influence it wots them to bend under. . . .

*December 17, 1847*

### BROAD FARCE IN LITERATURE—"THE *John-Donkey*"

IN advance, we have been supplied by the polite conductors with the initiative number of (for January 1, 1848,) "The *John-Donkey*," a new quarto illustrated journal of humor and drive-away-careism. It is rich exceedingly! The number sent us has more broad wit—the real coarse, but deep, true stuff, like Shakspeare's (without any indelicacy, however,)

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own natural comic humor—than any eight pages published, that we have seen. If “*John-Donkey*” keeps it up in this style, he will, in his own sphere, be better than any foreign humorous journal; because the points of his wit are mostly on this side of the Atlantic—and he don’t attempt (which was the great fault of the late “*Yankee Doodle*,”) to swim in the wake of the London and Paris comic papers. We welcome the new print, and would encourage it to persist, unflaggingly, in efforts equal to this first number—because, if it does, it will surely establish itself and “pay.” Let us treat our readers to the following extract: “A NICE JOB.—We understand that Mr. E. A. Poe has been employed to furnish the railing for the new railroad over Broadway. He was seen going up street a few days ago, apparently laying out the road.”

[This attitude toward Poe corresponds to Whitman’s early opinion of him. Whitman published Poe’s story, “Tale of the Ragged Mountains” in *The Eagle*, and was appreciative of “The Raven,” but confessed late in

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## WALT WHITMAN

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life that he had not rated Poe highly in his younger days.]

*March 29, 1847*

### MIND YOUR STOPS

OUR correspondent who complains of the hills of dirt in Prince and Gold streets, may be true enough in statement, but is terribly out in his commas and semicolons. We recommend the following "paragraph with a moral" on that subject. It is from an old schoolboy exercise: "Caesar entered on his head, his helmet on his feet, armed sandals upon his brow, there was a cloud in his right hand, his faithful sword in his eye; an angry glare saying nothing, he sat down."

*April 24, 1846*

### HOW TO WRITE FOR NEWSPAPERS

1. Have something to write about.
2. Write plain; dot your i's; cross your t's; point sentences; begin with capitals.
3. Write short; to the point; stop when you have

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done. 4. Write only on one side of the leaf.  
5. Read it over, abridge and correct it, until  
you get it into the shortest space possible. 6.  
Pay the postage.

*March 29, 1847*

### ONE OF THE LAST RELICS OF BIGOTRY

THE present interpretation of the law of  
libel.

*September 22, 1846*

Washington Irving reached New York  
City last Friday evening, and, on the following  
morning proceeded to his residence at Tarry-  
town.

[Whitman once said of Irving: "I  
never enthused over him." "With Walt  
Whitman in Camden," by Horace Traubel.]

*October 26, 1846*

John G. Whittier, the poet, came near  
meeting with a fatal accident some days since.

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A gun in the hands of a boy went off, the charge of which passed through the face of Whittier, out at his neck.

*December 2, 1846*

We know a very fair American writer who received *five dollars a month* for contributing to a certain magazine; and this while a made-moiselle who can kick her nose with her heels goes home with two or three 2000os.

*December 18, 1846*

It is stated that Mr. Poe, the poet and author, now lies dangerously ill with the brain fever, and that his wife is in the last stages of consumption.—They are said to be “without money and without friends, actually suffering from disease and destitution in New York.”

*February 1, 1847*

The death of Edgar A. Poe's wife is mentioned in the New York prints. She died on Saturday of pulmonary consumption. Her

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funeral will take place at Fordham tomorrow  
at 2 o'clock P.M.

*August 28, 1846*

### YANKEE IMPERTINENCE

DOES the audacious *Boston Post* mean to insinuate that *we* have any of Byron's *weak spots*?

*October 10, 1846*

If the *Boston Post* is green enough to doubt any thing positively affirmed in the *Brooklyn Eagle*, we quite despair of the Republic—at least the eastern section.

*September 8, 1846*

[Samuel] Lover, the novelist, who came over in the *Britannia*, is yet staying in New York. He should take quarters in Brooklyn. New York isn't good enough for such a clever fellow.

## WHITMAN'S BOOK REVIEWS

*November 9, 1846*

### CRITICISM—NEW Books

By an old and excellent custom—a custom good for the public, for the publishers of books, and for editors of newspapers—new works are presented to editors, that they may mention the same, and thus bring them before their readers. A newspaper that does not give such notice is “behind the age;” for brief as these notices generally are, they enable a man to keep up with what is going on in the literary world, and to see gradual steps made in the advancement of every thing. *This is true*—as any one will acknowledge after a moment’s reflection; for he who gets no inkling of any of the new developments constantly made, through books, (and he *will* get that inkling through honestly written book-notices,) lives quite in the Past. . . . The custom alluded to has another good effect also

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## WHITMAN'S BOOK REVIEWS

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—it enables *editors* to keep up, in some sort, with the foremost ones of the age. For though it cannot be expected that they will study from top to bottom every new book they have—that skimming tact which an editor gets after some experience, enables him to take out at a dash the meaning of a book—and his paper and his readers are invariably the gainers by it. An editor thus surrounded by the current literature of the age—by thoughts and facts evolved from master-minds, as well as imitators—*cannot lag behind*. In a thousand invisible but potent ways the result is good for his professional labors. As to the book notices in this journal, we hope to say nothing amiss, when we say that our readers lose something when they lose the reading of them. They are our candid opinions; leaning, as we prefer to lean, to a kindly vein—as it is not our province to “cut up” authors. . . . (A new book was sent us the other day with a highly eulogistic written notice, to be inserted as editorial. We can't do *such things*.) . . . It certainly were no compliment to the taste of Brooklynites, to

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## WALT WHITMAN

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assume that they feel no interest in literary matters.

*December 7, 1846*

“THE LIFE OF SAMUEL JOHNSON, L.L.D. INCLUDING A JOURNAL OF A TOUR TO THE HEBRIDES.” By James Boswell, Esq.

How it is with others we of course know not (probably the trait is not limited, however)—but with us, there lies always a dash of melancholy in reading which brings up the private life and thoughts, the sayings, repartees, prejudices, loves and hates, weaknesses and nobilities, of the literary people of a past age. They, too, were *writers*: they lived the feverish, uncertain life. And now they are long dead, and become ashes in the earth. (It is remarkable that hardly any intellectual persons have come to the end of their mortal journey, but with more or less

Grief that they had lived in vain!)

We read of Beattie, Dr. Robertson, Reynolds, and the fiery-breathed Burke. We read of

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## WHITMAN'S BOOK REVIEWS

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the poverty-pressed Goldsmith, the heedless but good-hearted one. Sheridan's dazzling wild genius, comes up and sparkles like a phantom scymitar again. The massive abstracted Gibbon,—clear as the ice of the topmost Alps—and as cold,—we see. And gentler presences, the light of the highest mental expression, set in those nonpareils of woman's eyes, and adorned with all the fascinating elegance of woman's high-bred grace, are before us too; Mrs. Piozzi, Mrs. Thrale, Mrs. Montagu, Miss Reynolds, (sister to Sir Joshua,) are caught ere they fade and fall; and we hear them as in the living time! Not in the dry and meagre way of hard statistics, have we all this, but in full volume and body; and this too not as in waxwork, but the flesh and blood of breathing life; and this too, not in state and formality, but with the mask thrown off—life at the social table and animated conversation where the tongue has the heart for its prompter—life even on bended knee, the soul opening its secret recesses to Heaven! . . . To say that pages involving a narrative of the traits of such people as we have just named—

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## WALT WHITMAN

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let alone the grim hero of the text, the “Great Bear” himself—must be *interesting*, would be using a common word to express a most vivid truth. . . . Nor will the conception fail to form itself in many readers’ minds, ere they get through. “All this and these are now passed away—and what has been their influence? what marks have they left on the world’s action, and afterward?” A comprehensive scope—the answer to such asking—which we cannot even begin on the edges of.

We are no admirer of such characters as Dr. Johnson. He was a sour, malicious, egotistical man. He was a sycophant of power and rank, withal; his biographer narrates that he “always spoke with rough contempt of popular liberty.” His head was educated to the point of *plus*; but for his heart, might still more unquestionably stand the sign *minus*. He insulted his equals with an outrageous disregard of common decency; and tyrannized over his inferiors. He fawned upon his superiors, and of course loved to be fawned upon himself. The didactic virtue spread through his writings is of that sermon-

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## WHITMAN'S BOOK REVIEWS

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izing sort, which is outweighed a thousand times by the least thing that comes home to the reader's breast—virtue fitted for practice in the world, and not merely, as Dr. Johnson's was, to round a period in a book. Nor were the freaks of this man the mere "eccentricities of genius": they were probably the faults of a vile low nature. His soul was a bad one. He wrote a dictionary, it is true; but the obligation due from the world for the work is no more or less than the obligation a man owes the pedagogue who thrashed spelling-lessons through his boyish skin, in the way of the said pedagogue's paid-for vocation. As to Johnson's miscellaneous writings, they have deservedly lost favor of late years in public taste—and merely retain a passing hold there on the strength of adjuncts, and precedent, foreign to themselves.

[Horace Traubel relates in his Camden talks that Thomas B. Harned gave Whitman Boswell's Johnson. Whitman said he had never read it. Later he gave his opinion of Johnson, which is almost identical with the

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## WALT WHITMAN

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above. "Johnson does not impress me." "I don't admire the old man's ponderous arrogance." etc.—"With Walt Whitman in Camden," by Horace Traubel.]

*March 15, 1847*

### HAZLITT'S "NAPOLEON"

PERHAPS men have looked at the old French Revolution, through the eyes of English Toryism, about long enough! The time seems to be arriving when the whole matter will be viewed in its true light; when the spacious eloquence of the declaimers who received office and pay from royalty for their declamation—when the false dread of encouraging popular license—when the perplexing cloud raised by the undoubted horror in the Revolution itself—all shall give way before a calm, clear view of the *whole* field, and so justice be meted out to all who played in that great drama, on that mighty stage. This time may not be forthwith; but we have too great faith in the penetrating, analytical power of the free inquiry which characterises our age, not to

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## WHITMAN'S BOOK REVIEWS

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rest in full confidence of its eventful coming. And it is such a work as the one whose name heads this article, that will hasten that coming. A noble, grand work! a democratic work! Let every lover of the *race* before classes—every contemner of the rule of keeping men “straight” on the principle wherewith nurses frighten children by bugaboos up the chimney—every man who fears not *the truth*, (without which history is a prostitute,)—every encourager of the great rights of man—help promulge this book. It is a wholesome book for the young fresh life of our Republic. It is a book for each growing man, who would not feed on the formal bigotry of the past—who would not be unconservative. . . . We hear of the “horrors” of the French Revolution: as if mere blotches on the skin, an unsightly eruption athwart the face of a man, were more horrible than the long, dreary deadness, the lethargy and decay, of the vital organs within—while the blood should stagnate, and the veins and million nerves were forbidden their power and functions. For thus it was with France—the

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WALT WHITMAN

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Revolution being the blotch—the ages before it, tallying that dreary deadness. . . . And shall we hear much longer the conservative sing-song (fruit, as we have intimated, from the seeds of old English Toryism) which overlooks all the broad and deep things of that era, and what went before it, and simply appeals to our sympathies for passing physical pain, not one tithe as intense and suffered by not one tithe as many, as in the years before—merely because the latter was borne passively and beneath the surface? We too dread the horrors of the sword and of violence—of blood-shed, and a maddened people. But we would rather at this moment over every kingdom on the continent of Europe, that *the people* should rise and enact the same prodigious destructions as those of the French Revolution, could they thus root out the kingcraft and priestcraft which are annually dwindling down humanity there to a lower and lower average—an appalling prospect ahead, for any one who *thinks* ahead! Moreover, when it is observed how deeply the fangs of that kingcraft are fixed—and how through-and-through the virus

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WHITMAN'S BOOK REVIEWS

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of that priestcraft is infused—it will make one come nigh to think that only some great retching of the social and political structure can achieve the blessed consummation.

January 10, 1848

MILTON

IT has been said of Milton that he does not persuade but *commands* admiration. The same remark may be made in reference to this edition of the works of the great poet of heaven and hell. Without any extravagance of language, it is an edition which, whatever may be the improvements in and additions to typographical embellishments for many years to come, *must* remain a choice work of the age! It is published in two volumes, large duodecimos; and is *explained*, as well as adorned, with one hundred and twenty engravings, from drawings by William Harvey. It is also prefaced with a memoir of Milton, and critical remarks on his genius and writings, by James Montgomery. The type will be pronounced by the critical printer a marvel of clearness

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## WALT WHITMAN

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and cleanliness—every letter and every hair-stroke standing forth as sharply cut on the thick white paper of superfine quality, as is the choicest specimen of London work—to which we consider this fully equal, even the best of it! Bound in durable morocco, and liberally gilt, with ornaments designed by the hand of taste, there is hardly a book, even from the Harpers' teeming press, which deserves higher praise, in the method of its execution, than this.

There seems to be a peculiar appropriateness, it may almost be said a *necessity*, that *Milton's* poems should be put before the world in such a graceful and elegantly adorned manner. With all his grandeur, this poet certainly wants some endearing and softening accompaniments—even those furnished by these beautiful pictorial designs, and by the superb outward embellishments of the volume under notice. As a writer, Milton is stern, lofty, and grand; his themes are heavenly high, and profoundly deep. A man must have something of the poet's own vast abruptness (if we [may] use such a term,) in order to appreciate

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## WHITMAN'S BOOK REVIEWS

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this writer, who, apparently conscious of his own gigantic proportions, disdains the usual graces and tricks of poets who are read more widely, and understood more easily, because they have *not* his qualities. The towering pile of cliffs, with yawning caverns in the side, and mysterious summits piercing the clouds, while the lightning plays on their naked breasts, is not, to the usual world, half so favorite an object as the landscape of cultivated meadows fringed with a little wood, and watered by a placid stream.

For our part, we think a reader of him who was indeed inspired by the

heavenly muse that on the secret top  
Of Oreb, or Sinai, didst inspire  
That shepherd who first taught the chosen seed,  
In the beginning, how the heaven and earth,  
Rose out of chaos,

Would *understand* his teacher better, in such an edition as this new one of the Harpers'. For who shall despise manner and appearance? The pictorial designs have caught the spirit of the poet, and speak through the eye to the mind.

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## WALT WHITMAN

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[Whitman's final judgment on Milton differs but little from this, if we read between the lines. He always questioned himself about Milton but told Traubel, November 26, 1888: "There's no use talking, he won't go down with me."—"With Walt Whitman in Camden," by Horace Traubel.]

*October 17, 1846*

"HEROES AND HERO WORSHIP." By Thomas Carlyle

[This was the beginning of the Carlyle influence in Whitman's life, an influence which grew stronger with the years. Whitman had much to say about Carlyle to Horace Traubel at Camden, and once made a warm defense of Carlyle's style (August 8, 1888). He came to appreciate that the author of "Heroes and Hero Worship" was not merely inventing a new style. See "Death of Thomas Carlyle" and "Carlyle from American Points of View" in "Specimen Days."]

Under his rapt, weird, (grotesque?) style  
the writer of this work has placed—we may

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## WHITMAN'S BOOK REVIEWS

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almost say *hidden*—many noble thoughts. That his eyes are clear to the numerous ills which afflict humanity, and [that he is a Democrat in that enlarged sense in which we would fain see more men Democrats;—that he is quick to champion the downtrodden, and earnest in his wrath at tyranny—is evident enough in almost any one page of Mr. Carlyle's writings.] . . . We must confess, however, that we would have preferred to get the thoughts of this truly good thinker, in a plainer and more customary garb. No great writer achieves any thing worthy of him, by inventing merely a new *style*. Style in writing, is much as a dress in society; sensible people will conform to the prevalent mode, as it is not of infinite importance any how, and can always be so varied as to fit one's peculiar way, convenience, or circumstance.

"SARTOR RESARTUS." By Thomas Carlyle

This has all of Mr. Carlyle's strange wild way;—and all his fiery-breath and profundity of meaning—when you delve them out.

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## WALT WHITMAN

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November 23, 1846

"THE FRENCH REVOLUTION," A HISTORY. By  
Thomas Carlyle

Backing the title page of this edition, appears an announcement from Mr. Carlyle, that it is one which he has "read over and revised into a correct state" for W. & P. [Wiley & Putnam], who are thereby authorized, "they and they only," so far as Mr. Carlyle can authorize them, to print and vend the same in the United States. This is equivalent to making it the imperative duty of every honorable man, (and who wishes to get the work authentically) to purchase this edition exclusively—where he can get it. For though our unrighteous system of plunder in the literary and publication world gives any man the chance to pirate and print this book, without *legal* offence—it were none the less offence against justice and common decency. . . . By the way, how stands the International Copyright cause? Is any thing doing to induce action in the coming session of Congress? We should think by this time, that not only American authors,

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## WHITMAN'S BOOK REVIEWS

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but American publishers, had reason to favor this reciprocity of copyright. Honesty *is* the best policy, even in publishing books.

Mr. Carlyle's genius, as involved in the work whose title we have given above, is ~~too~~ broad a subject and provokes too many inferences, to be properly treated in one of these short notices.]

"PAST AND PRESENT, AND CHARTISM." By Thomas Carlyle

One likes Mr. Carlyle, the more he communes with him; there is a sort of fascination about the man. His weird, wild way—his phrases, welded together as it were, with strange twistings of the terminatives of words—his startling suggestions—his taking up, fishhook like, certain matters of abuse—make an original kind of composition, that gets, after a little usage, to be strangely agreeable! This "Past and Present, and Chartism," now—who would ever puzzle out the drift of the book from the chapter-heads? from such phrases as "Plugson on Undershot," or "The One Institution," or "Gospel of Dilettantism"? And yet there lies rich ore under that vague surface.

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## WALT WHITMAN

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*November 19, 1846*

"THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF GOETHE—TRUTH AND POETRY: FROM MY LIFE." From the German of Goethe, by Parke Godwin.

What a prodigious gain would accrue to the world, if men who write well would as much think of writing LIFE, as they (most of them) think it necessary to write one of the million things evolved from life—Learning! What a gain it would be, if we could forego some of the heavy tomes, the fruit of an age of toil and scientific study, for the simple easy *truthful* narrative of the existence and experience of a man of genius,— how his mind unfolded in his earliest years—the impressions things made upon him—how and where and when the religious sentiment dawned in him—what he thought of God before he was inoculated with books' ideas—the development of his soul—when he first loved—the way circumstances imbued his nature, and did him good, and worked him ill,—with all the long train of occurrences, adventures, mental processes, exercises within, and trials without, which go

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## WHITMAN'S BOOK REVIEWS

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to make up the man—for *character* is the man, after all.

[Whitman was so impressed with Goethe's autobiography that he published three columns of extracts from it, which he liberally interlarded with enthusiastic and appreciative comments. He never lost his early impression of Goethe. On November 23, 1888, he said to Horace Traubel: [Goethe impresses me as above all to stand for essential literature, art, life—to argue the importance of centering life in self—in perfect persons—perfect you, me: to make himself, Goethe, the supremest example of personal identity.]—“With Walt Whitman in Camden.”]

*November 5, 1846*

“DOMBEY AND SON.” By Charles Dickens

Uniform with their “Books which *are* books,” Wiley & Putnam are issuing this new Tale of Dickens. It strikes us as promising something of the *real* Dickens sort—the Nickleby and Twist style;—something much better than his later larger works.

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## WALT WHITMAN

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*March 22, 1847*

### “DOMBEY AND SON”

Wiley & Putnam have issued the first part of this work—the five nos. from the birth of “little Paul” to his death—in one volume, uniform with their handsomely printed library editions of works. The first part may be said to form a sort of novel in itself—for it is the artistically complete life of one of Dickens’ best drawn and most consistently sustained characters.

*July 20, 1847*

### “DOMBEY AND SON”

The only real *characters* in Dombey and Son,” are little Paul and Edith. The rest are all imitations,—second-hand affairs.

[“Dickens had something the same makeup as Conway; if a story is not interesting make it so.” “But your general feeling toward Dickens—what is that?” “Of great admiration—very great: I acknowledge him without question: he will live.” Conversation October 29, 1888, “With Walt Whitman in Cam-

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## WHITMAN'S BOOK REVIEWS

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den," by Horace Traubel. See also, "Boz and His New Paper," page 256, Vol. II.]

*October 12, 1846*

### LONGFELLOW'S "POEMS"

This is a handsome fifty cent edition of many of the finest poems in the English language—for we consider Mr. Longfellow to be gifted by God with a special faculty of dressing beautiful thoughts in beautiful words. The country is not half just to this eloquent writer; an honor and a glory as he is to the American name—and deserving to stand on the same platform with Bryant and Wordsworth. The pages of the book we are noticing abound with proofs of this deserving: one little turn of thought alone in his poem of "Rain" is a specimen—a startlingly wild and solemn thought, which, in its complete out-of-the-way-ness from anything like commonplace, could never have sprung in the mind of any but a genuine Converser with the Ideal:—

For his thought, that never stops,  
Follows the water drops

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## WALT WHITMAN

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Down to the graves of the dead,  
Down through the chasms and gulfs profound,  
To the dreary fountain-head  
Of lakes and rivers under ground;  
And sees them when the rain is done,  
On the bridge of colors seven  
Climbing up once more to heaven,  
Opposite the setting sun—

Says he—as a suggestion of how the commonest occurrences offer themes of great thoughts to the true poet.

[Whitman came finally to rate Longfellow fourth among American poets. See "With Walt Whitman in Camden," by Horace Traubel, for his later estimates; also, "Death of Longfellow" in "Specimen Days."]

*December 4, 1847*

"BIOGRAPHIA LITERARIA;" biographical sketches of my literary life and opinions.  
By Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

To a person of literary taste, the first pleasure of reading any thing written by Coleridge will be, that it is written in such choice and unaffected style—next that the author evi-

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WHITMAN'S BOOK REVIEWS

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dently lays open his whole heart with the artlessness of a child—and next that there is no commonplace or cant. These are exceedingly rare merits, at the present day. . . . "Biographia Literaria" will reach the deepest thoughts of the "choice few" among readers who can appreciate the fascinating subtleties of Coleridge; and both volumes will be entertaining to the general reader, from their fund of anecdote, and the good humor that will rise to the surface even of such a poetical nature as that child of song's. In some respects we think this man stands above all poets: he was passionate without being morbid—he was like Adam in Paradise, and almost as free from artificiality.

*September 30, 1846*

"THE COUNT OF MONTE-CRISTO." By Alexander Dumas

Sparkling in quality and plentiful in quantity appears to be this work—*appears*, for we confess to not having read it. There are certainly, however, a pleasant gracefulness and

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## WALT WHITMAN

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vivacity in Dumas' writings—that we can say from our knowledge of his former works. His pages are mostly full of interest and stir, and amid all his lightness, the penetrating eye can generally draw a profitable moral.

*April 14, 1847*

“DIANA OF MERIDOR.” By Alexander Dumas

The reputation of the French novelist, as a writer of “thrilling” romance, is familiar enough to all who have much acquaintance with literature.—Among certain classes, he is the most popular writer in the “gay land.”

*April 14, 1847*

“SYLVANDIRE.” By Alexander Dumas

We like this better as a story, than the foregoing, by the same author. Indeed, we think there are not many books, of its scope, with superior interest.

THOMSON'S “SEASONS.”

Among nature's truest worshippers and most graphic painters has for a hundred years

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## WHITMAN'S BOOK REVIEWS

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been considered the poet, [James] Thomson. His "Seasons" is not surpassed by any book with which we are acquainted, in its happy limning of the scenes it professes to represent; in its faculty of bringing before the reader the clear sight of everything in its scope. In Harper's new illustrated edition of this poem, the pictorial designers have caught the inspiration of the poet himself, and well wrought upon the hints and suggestions he made. Some of the designs are equal in spirit and boldness of touch to paintings which the world has long thought well of. There are nearly eighty of these fine embellishments; they fit in at the sides, tops, and corners of the pages, in a novel and most appropriate manner, while the text runs on side by side with them. We are informed in the preface that the illustrations are printed from copper blocks, formed by the electrotype process. This method has been found to be attended with several advantages in printing, besides the means which it affords of preserving the original blocks, and of renewing the electrotypes, thus forming a perpetual security against inferior impressions of the designs.

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WALT WHITMAN

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*May 20, 1847*

Mrs. Fanny Kemble Butler's "Year of Consolation" has been printed by Wiley & Putnam, New York, in one neat volume, uniform with their general publications. The authoress is one of the most erratic women that ever lived; which is saying a most prodigious deal! In her writings she has no comparative degree—but considerable of the positive; and more considerable of the superlative. . . . In this "year," (at Rome,) there were several interesting chapters—and here and there a passage of sterling beauty—sometimes, even, an original thought. And it is remarkable how the helter-skelter style of such books—skipping and hopping—disdainful, shallow, sentimental, gossipy, and many other things besides—grows upon the reader. Thus such works are refreshing; for sordid and heavy food is not craved always by the stomach.

[This was Fanny Kemble, the actress, whose playing was much praised by Whitman.]

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## WHITMAN'S BOOK REVIEWS

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*June 16, 1847*

From Munroe & Company, Boston, we get a translation, by Charles T. Brooks, of "Schiller's Homage of the Arts": With miscellaneous pieces from Rückert, Freiligrath, and other German poets. In its creamy tinted binding, and the richer than creamy contents, this volume is indeed acceptable. Among a mass of blooming lines, we still think the following, from Rückert, chaste and beautiful:

### ALEXANDER'S POWER

When Alexander died he gave command,  
They from his coffin should let hang, his hand,  
That all men who had seen him formerly  
Exulting in the pomp of royalty,  
Might now see, that, with empty hands, alone,  
He, too, the universal road had gone,  
And that, of all his treasures, nothing save  
That empty hand went with him to the grave.

[Years later Ferdinand Freiligrath translated Whitman's work into German.]

*March 5, 1846*

### KEATS' "POETICAL WORKS"

Keats—peace to his ashes—was one of the pleasantest of modern poets, and had not the

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## WALT WHITMAN

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grim monster Death so early claimed him, would doubtless have become one of the most distinguished.

[“He (Keats) is sweet—oh! very sweet—all sweetness: almost lush; lush, polish, ornateness, elegance.”—“With Walt Whitman in Camden,” by Horace Traubel.]

*April 2, 1847*

THE KING'S HIGHWAY. By G. P. R. James

We do not like the involved, wiry style of this author at all. If he wrote but little, it would be too much; and so he writes too much, in a double sense.

“MARRIAGE: its history and ceremonies, etc.”

By L. N. Fowler

The verdant prudishness has passed away, which would be offended at any discussion—in the plain, comprehensive, and perfectly decorous style of this book—of the subject which it treats on.

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## WHITMAN'S BOOK REVIEWS

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*March 12, 1847*

“THE LIFE OF CHRIST,” in the words of the  
Evangelists

In looking over such a book as this, one is impressed with the interest, even as a narrative, and apart from its sacred character, of the history of “him who spake as never man spake.”

*March 4, 1847*

“WOMAN, AND HER DISEASES, FROM THE CRADLE TO THE GRAVE.” By Edward H. Dixon, M.D.

“To the pure, all things are pure,” is the not inappropriate motto of this work: and the mock delicacy that condemns the widest possible diffusion among females of such knowledge as is contained in this book, will receive from us no quarter. Let any one bethink him a moment how rare is the sight of a well developed, healthy *naturally* beautiful woman: let him reflect how widely the customs of our artificial life, joined with ignorance

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WALT WHITMAN

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of physiological facts are increasing the rarity, (if we may be allowed such an approach to a bull,)—and he will hardly dispute the necessity of such publications as this.

*October 11, 1847*

#### LATE PUBLICATIONS

Old and not unwelcome reminiscences are to us brought up by half-idly looking o'er the pages of a new edition of the tales of "The Arabian Nights." They bring up the loving and greedy eagerness with which boyhood read these tales—a love surpassing the love for puddings and confectionery!—What a gorgeous world to revel in withal!—the turbans and mirrors, the gemmed garments, the beautiful women, the slaves, the cutting off of heads, the magic changes, the dwarfs, the spiteful old sorcerers, the disguises, the dark caves, the cobblers transformed into princes—O, it was indeed gorgeous! Then that caliph, always a-going through the by streets of the city at night—what on earth could be more novel and interesting? . . . Certain moral-

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## WHITMAN'S BOOK REVIEWS

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ists there are, of the vinegar complexion, who would forbid all works of fiction to the young. Yet such is always a foolish interdict. The minds of boys and girls warm and expand—become rich and generous—under the aspect of such florid pages as those of "Robinson Crusoe," "The Arabian Nights," "Marco Polo," and the like.

*March 20, 1847*

### WORKS FOR SCHOOLS, AND FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Honor to those who truly write for the young! say we. Because, although such a field of one's labors is worthy the highest talent, it is generally considered fitting to a third or fourth rate employment.—But to write *well* for the young, we reiterate, is worthy of the best literary genius. The *Juvenile Budget Opened*, (Harper's pub.) is a pleasing and moral collection of over forty sketches and tales from the writings of Dr. Aikin and Mrs. Barbauld. We like well to hear from publishers that there is a greater and greater demand for this sort of books every year.

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WALT WHITMAN

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*December 26, 1846*

“ROBINSON CRUSOE”

Lives there the boy that ha'nt read *Crusoe*?  
If so, he is to be pitied; and his papa and  
friends are to be blamed for not presenting  
him with it. . . .

## WHITMAN AS A DRAMATIC CRITIC

[WHITMAN's interest in the drama and the theater began before he became editor of *The Eagle* and never flagged to the end. Long after he gave up playgoing he read plays and dramatic criticism and followed the careers of actors. "The Stage" was the one magazine he said he always read through in his later Camden days. In "Democratic Vistas" Whitman developed the ideas of American drama he first outlined here and related them to his general conception of an American literature. In his several bits of playgoing reminiscences, "The Old Bowery," "Plays and Operas, Too," and "Old Singers, Actors, Shows, etc., in New York" he recalls many of the actors and plays he saw and commented upon in *The Eagle* of 1846 and 1847. Harry Placide, Mrs. Vernon (Charlotte Cushman's sister), Charlotte Cushman, the younger Kean, Ellen Tree and others, remained fixed in his memory.]

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WALT WHITMAN

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*February 8, 1847*

MISERABLE STATE OF THE STAGE.—WHY CAN'T  
WE HAVE SOMETHING WORTH THE NAME  
OF AMERICAN DRAMA!

OF all "low" places where vulgarity (not only on the stage, but in front of it) is in the ascendant, and bad-taste carries the day with hardly a pleasant point to mitigate its coarseness, the New York theatres—except the Park) may be put down (as an Emeralder might say,) at the top of the heap! We don't like to make these sweeping assertions in general—but the habit of such places as the Bowery, the Chatham, and the Olympic theatres is really beyond all toleration; and if the New York prints who give dramatic notices, were not the slaves of the paid puff system, they surely would sooner or later be "down" on those miserable burlesques of the histrionic art. Yet not one single independent dramatic critic seems to be among many talented writers for the New York press. Or rather, we should say, not one single upright critic is permitted to utter candidly his opinion

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## WHITMAN AS A DRAMATIC CRITIC

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of the theatricals of the metropolis; for we would not insult the good taste of the intelligent literary men connected with the press over the river, so much as to suppose that their eyes and ears do not make the same complaint to them as ours make to us in the matter alluded to.

We have excepted the Park theatre in the charge of vulgarity, because the audiences there are always intelligent, and there is a dash of superiority thrown over the performances. But commendation can go not much further. Indeed it is not a little strange that in a great place like New York, acknowledged as the leading city on the Western Hemisphere, there should be no absolutely *good* theatres. The Park, once in a great while, gives a fine play, performed by meritorious actors and actresses. The Park is still very far, however, from being what we might reasonably expect in the principal dramatic establishment of the metropolis. It is but a third-rate imitation of the best London theatres. It gives us the cast off dramas, and the unengaged players of Great Britain;

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and of these dramas and players, like garments which come second hand from gentleman to valet, everything fits awkwardly. Though now and then there is ground for satisfaction, the average is such as men of refinement cannot applaud at all. A play arranged to suit an English audience, and to jibe with English localities, feelings, and domestic customs, can rarely be represented in America, without considerable alteration. This destroys its uniformity, and generally deprives it of all life and spirit. One of the curses of the Park, and indeed of nearly all theatres now, is the *star* system. Some actor or actress flits about the country, playing a week here and a week there, bringing as his or her greatest recommendation, that of *novelty*—and very often indeed having no other.—In all the intervals between the appearance of these much trumpeted people, the theatre is quite deserted, though the plays and playing are often far better than during some star engagement. We have seen a fine old English drama, with Miss Cushman and her sister—Mrs. Vernon, Placide, Fisher, and several others whose bet-

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## WHITMAN AS A DRAMATIC CRITIC

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ters in their departments could hardly be found—we have seen such a beautiful piece, well put upon the stage, and played to a forlorn looking audience, thinly scattered here and there through pit and box—while the very next week crowds would crush each other to get a sight of some flippant well-puffed star, of no real merit, and playing a character written (for the play consists of nothing but *one*, in such cases) by nobody knows whom—probably an ephemeral manufacturer of literature, with as little talent as his employer.

If some bold man would take the theatre in hand in this country, and resolutely set his face against the starring system, as a system,—some *American* it must be, and not moulded in the opinions and long established ways of the English stage,—if he should take high ground, revolutionize the drama, and discard much that is not fitted to present tastes and to modern ideas,—engage and encourage American talent, (a term made somewhat nauseous by the use it has served for charlatans, but still a good term,) look above merely the gratification of the vulgar and of those who love

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glittering scenery—give us American plays too, matter fitted to American opinions and institutions—our belief is he would do the Republic service, and himself too, in the long round.

*February 12, 1847*

### WHY DO THEATRES LANGUISH? AND HOW SHALL THE AMERICAN STAGE BE RESUSCITATED?

To him who has anything like the proper appreciation of the noble scope of good of which the American drama might be made capable, this inquiry now-a-days must often suggest itself. Is it not amazing that we have not before this thrown off our slavish dependence even in what some would call a comparatively small matter of theatricals? *It is full time.*—English managers, English actors, and English plays, (we say it in no spirit of national antipathy, a feeling of hate) must be allowed to die away among us, as usurpers of our stage. The drama of this country *can* be the mouth-piece of freedom, refinement, liberal





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philanthropy, beautiful love for all our brethren, polished manners and an elevated good taste. It can wield potent sway to destroy any attempt at despotism—it can attack and hold up to scorn bigotry, fashionable affectation, avarice, and all unmanly follies. Youth may be warned by its fictitious portraits of the evil of unbridled passions. Wives and husbands may see perhaps for the first time in their lives, a long needed lesson of the absurdity of contentious tempers, and of those small but painful disputes that embitter domestic life—contrasted with the pleasant excellence of a forbearing, forgiving, and affectionate spirit. The son or daughter just entering the door of dissipation may get timely view of that inward rottenness which is concealed in such an outside of splendor. All—every age and every condition in life—may with profit visit a well regulated dramatic establishment, and go away better than when they came.—In order to reap such by no means difficult results, the whole method of theatricals, as at present pursued in New York, needs first to be overthrown.—The

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great and good reformer who should with fearless hand attempt the task of a new organization, would meet with many difficulties and much ridicule; but that he would succeed is in every respect probable, if he possessed ordinary perseverance and discretion. New York City is the only spot in America where such a revolution could be attempted, too. With all our servility, to foreign fashions, there is at the heart of the intelligent masses there, a lurking propensity toward what is original, and has a stamped American character of its own. In New York, also, are gathered together a number of men—literary persons and others—who have a strong desire to favor any thing which shall extricate us from the entangled and by no means creditable position we already hold of playing second fiddle to Europe. These persons—most of them young men, enthusiastic, democratic, and liberal in their feelings—are daily acquiring a greater and greater power. And after all, anything appealing to the honest heart of the people, as to the peculiar and favored children of freedom,—as to a new race and with a

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## WHITMAN AS A DRAMATIC CRITIC

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character separate from the kingdoms of other countries—would meet with a ready response, and strike at once the sympathies of all the true men who love America, their native or chosen land.

As to the particular details of the system which should supplant theatricals as they now exist, the one who in greatness of purpose conceives the effort only can say. That effort must be made by a man or woman of no ordinary talent—with a clear comprehensiveness of what is wanted—not too great a desire for pecuniary profit—little respect for old modes and the accustomed usage of the stage—an *American* in heart and hand—and liberal in disposition to provide whatever taste and propriety may demand. The assistance of writers of genius will of course be required. The whole custom of paid newspaper puffs should be discarded, entirely and utterly. There is hardly any thing more contemptible, and indeed unprofitable in the long run, than this same plan of some paid personage writing laudatory notices of the establishment which pays him, and then sending them to the news-

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papers, to be printed as the spontaneous opinions of the editors. A person of genius we say again, must effect this reform—and about genius there is something capable of seeing its course instinctively for itself, which makes trifling hints, details, and minor particulars, altogether impertinent. Until such a person comes forward, and works out such a reform, theatricals in this country will continue to languish, and theatres be generally more and more deserted by men and women of taste, (rightfully too) as has been the case for eight or ten years past.

*September 4, 1846*

### HONEST OPINIONS FOREVER

IF intelligent writers for the press will only express their real opinions of the stage, and of players, we shall soon have things as nearly right as they can be under the old system—which will be something gained. There are really very few men who will summon courage to say or write the actual way in which any work of art—or the performances of an artist—

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## WHITMAN AS A DRAMATIC CRITIC

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really strikes them. Now when one goes and sees a play or a player he need not remember the puffs he had read in the morning paper—because, in most cases, the puffs are paid for either in money to the publisher, or treats, suppers, or gifts to the *critics*. He need not be afraid of offending other people's tastes—because nature has given him eyes and ears, and the passion which if acting touches not it is *no* acting—and as far as he goes, he is as much a part of the audience to be pleased as any other one man, and he had far better be himself than anybody else, in making up his mind. He need not even rely on the criticisms of acknowledged, "men of talent": because two-thirds of the men of talent, nowadays, are schooled artificially, till their brains have often the same false tone as the palate of the habitual user of stimulants. . . . If a picture, a sculpture, a play or an actor, don't impress you highly, don't *affect* to be impressed highly, for that some self-styled connoisseurs have gone in raptures about it. That would be a miserable affectation indeed—and yet it is common as the hours. Most people get into

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the general contagion around them in such things; it is enough for them to know what "the fashion is." This has come to be a very serious evil, particularly in drama. The merest "stick," properly "brought before the public," by himself, his friends, or a theatrical manager, takes, to appearance, all those plaudits which should be reserved for rare and royal genius. . . . Here we have, season after season, the veriest succession of third-rate players, superannuated playeresses, and broken-down foreign artists, paraded for (their profits and) the admiration of the Americans, and *successfully* so—a fact to make a man ashamed of his country, and suspicious of another fact, otherwise firm as the hills, that we are the most intellectual nation on the breast of the earth!

And it is such truckling that takes the health out not only of our literature, but our criticism—an office, this latter, which has no worth in this country, and is confessedly in the dust. When will American writers, even the best of them, learn to be true to the soul and thoughts God has given them? When will they pass

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the slough of the imitation of the conventionalities of other people?—the slough not only of the past, with its mummeries, its ironic foolishness, and its paralytic influence on natural truth—but of the present, coming to them at second hand, and having the same degenerating effect in the moral world as continued breeding in-and-in has in the physical?

*August 20, 1846*

### DRAMATICS; AND THE TRUE SECRET OF ACTING

THE philosophy of acting resides entirely in the feelings and passion—to touch them, wake them, and calm them. No man can be a good actor without this power—and the more he has it, the greater he is upon the stage. This is stating the thing in its simplest form. . . . Now there are two ways of exercising such a sway over the passions of an audience—the usual way, which is boisterous, stormy, physical, and repugnant to truth and taste; and another way, that actors rarely condescend to take, which consists in an in-

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variable adherence to Nature, and is entirely mental, and works from within to the outward, instead of being altogether outward. The mental style was Macready's in his best days; he touched the heart, the soul, the feelings, the inner blood and nerves of his audience. The ordinary actor struts and rants away, and his furious declamation begets a kind of reciprocal excitement among those who hear him, it is true—but there is as much difference between it and the result produced by the true actor, as between mind and body. Though we never acted on the stage, we know well enough, from the analogy of things, that the best way in the world to represent grief, remorse, love, or any given passion, is to feel them at the time, and throw the feeling as far as possible into word and act. This is a rare art, we admit; but no man or woman can be really great on the stage who has it not. The strange and subtle sympathy which runs like an electrical charge through human hearts collected together, responds only to the touch of the true fire. We have known the time when an actual awe and dread crept over a

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## WHITMAN AS A DRAMATIC CRITIC

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large body assembled in the theatre, when Macready merely appeared, walking down the stage, a king. He was a king—not because he had a tinsel-gilded crown, and the counterfeit robe, but because he then dilated his heart with the attributes of majesty, and they looked forth from his eyes, and appeared in his walk. Such a power was worth a thousand vociferous plaudits for giving words of anger or defiance in tones to split the very roof! Mrs. Siddons, in characters where a moving passion was maternal grief, wept hot, scalding, real tears! Kean's eyes, in Richard, used to burn almost lurid with hate and wicked wishes!—What agitation caused in a spectator's mind, merely by loud lungs, can equal in intensity the result of one little touch of real feeling of this kind?

Sock, and Buskin! let us whisper in your ear (if any one of you reads this paragraph) the whole secret of penetrating your hearers' hearts: Throw into your identity (due labor and perseverance will give you the art of doing so at will) the character you are to represent. This, under the guidance of dis-

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cretion and good taste, is all that is necessary to make the best of performers. Discard the assistance of *mere* physical applications. You have hammered away long enough at the ear—condescend, at last, to affect the heart.

We went over last evening (19th) to the Park Theatre to see how they were getting along—the old management and most of the old stock company, in a new commencement. The piece was “The Nervous Man”: and the best played part in it, by far, was Mr. Barrett’s Mr. Aspen. It was indeed a treat to see such a bit of art, as that—true to nature, not overdone, point-device in everything. Mr. Collins (the star) has an agreeable way with him, and a person may well sit and take pleasure from his performance; but there are many players in the stock cos. in New York quite as well as he. Mrs. Vernon, (Lady Leech) of course, did what she had to do, to admiration! She is not surpassed by any actress on the boards in her line; and is one of the public’s (and our) dear old favorites. . . . The house was well filled last night, and we

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## WHITMAN AS A DRAMATIC CRITIC

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should think the management was putting money in its purse.

*August 14, 1846*

### ABOUT ACTING

THIS morning's *News* says: "The London papers have unequivocally asserted that Miss Cushman's performance of Ellen Tree's best part is superior to any acting that has been seen there. Miss Cushman, on Ellen Tree's own ground, ranks with the critics as a second Siddons." . . . Charlotte Cushman is *no* "second Siddons": she is *herself*, and that is far, far better! From what we have seen and heard, (and we consider ourselves no "chicken" about stage matters,) C. C. is ahead of any player that ever yet trod the stage. Fanny Kemble, Ellen Tree, Miss Phillips, etc.,—Macready, Kean, Kemble, etc.—all had, or have, their merits; all played well, and their acting has afforded many an intelligent man and woman a rich treat. But Miss Cushman assuredly bears away the palm from them all, men and women. She seems

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to identify herself so completely with the character she is playing; she loses, for the nonce, every attribute, except those which enter into the making up of what she is to pourtray. And particularly does she identify herself with the *mental* peculiarities of the played character. Ah, who has seen her appalling Nancy Sykes, (the most intense acting ever *felt* on the Park boards,)—who has seen her Evadne, in “The Bridal,” but acknowledged the towering grandeur of her genius! In the simple utterance of her shrieking “yes! yes! yes!” as she swings down to her brother’s feet, was one of the greatest triumphs of the histrionic art, ever achieved! In the twinkling of an eye—in the utterance of a word—was developed the total revolution of a mighty and guilty mind—from pride, defiance, anger, and rioting guilt, to an utterly crushed state of fear, remorse, and conscious vileness! Never shall we forget the surpassing beauty of that performance!. . . We don’t know how others may think; but we consider it a shame that such a woman as Charlotte Cushman, should ever have been allowed to be superseded by the fifth rate

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## WHITMAN AS A DRAMATIC CRITIC

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artistic? trash that comes over to us from the Old World! We have seen C. C. throw more genius into a representation of the Widow Melnotte, in "The Lady of Lyons," than the much-puffed Claude and Pauline, ("from the Theatre Royal," etc., etc., evinced in their whole most popular and profitable *star* engagement! Nor was hers the only case of the like injustice.

*September 1, 1846*

### ACTING. . . . THE KEANS

[This was Charles John Kean, the son of Edmund. Mrs. Kean was formerly Ellen Tree.]

THE morning *News* appears angry because we do not applaud Mrs. and Mr. Kean. In good sooth, the history of the stage can show few instances of greater business done on infinitely little capital, than in young Kean's case. His manner, gait, and gestures are unnatural—his almost invariable tone being what may be called a nasal huskiness, (to invent a phrase

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## WALT WHITMAN

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for something so new, that there has never been any need of describing it,)—and his constant wrenching of the eye-brows is surely out of all nature and truth. Though other actors have had as sharp jagged voices as Mr. Kean's voice, that demerit has been counterbalanced by genius—which he has not. That he has not that indescribable facility of fitness to the character to be represented—not the least particle of the “divine fire” which all real artists have, beyond the mere mechanical tact—is as surely undeniable. Long familiarity with the stage, considerable study, etc., have of course enabled Mr. Kean to possess the knack of gaining here and there what is called “a point” in his acting. It would be strange, playing year after year, if he did not. But this is merely the exception, not the rule. His present position is the result solely of fortuitous circumstances—his father's mighty fame, the disputes about his talent abroad, his marriage with Ellen Tree, etc., etc.—As respects his position in this country, that is not much. The principal two-cent paper in New York is suborned for a regular sum to puff him every

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## WHITMAN AS A DRAMATIC CRITIC

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day. The "situation" of very few New York editors is such that they can and will speak their independent opinions of an actor or any other artist. They are slaves, moreover, to the dictation (assumed or really made) by foreign "critics." They dare not think for themselves, or look out of their own eyes. They have, it is true, the wonderful courage to seize on such a third-rate man as Mr. Collins, and hunt down—but they quail at condemning infinitely greater defections, such as Kean's.

Of the lady, truth will not allow much more favorable mention. She *was* a young woman of genius—she is *merely* the frame and thews of that time, with none of its pliant grace, its smoothness, its voluptuous swell—(merely extra, and *not* extra.) Gallantry and common politeness require the avoidance of criticising her merits as plainly as her husband's. Manliness and ordinary decency, however, demand even more imperatively the avoidance of that fulsome sawdering of praise which a portion of the papers voluntarily demean themselves to publish.

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As to what “stock performers” in this country are better than the Keans: Strip the incidental glare from the latter, and not *one* local or general “favorite” on our American stage, but is better.—Miss Clarke at the Olympic is better, and truer—*only* she is “little Miss Clarke.” Mrs. Shaw is better. In their lines, Mrs. Vernon, Susan Cushman, (we cannot *stoop* to the Keans, from Charlotte,) Mrs. Chapman and Mrs. Hilson that we used to have at the Park, are or were better. Jamison can give Kean any odds, and play better. John R. Scott is better. In their lines, Placide and Barrett and Chippendale develop “gifts” that are as much ahead of the Keans as one of Thorburn’s choice fragrant lilies is ahead of the gaudiest bunch of artificial gauze and silver flower-work ever made by the cunningest French milliner!

*December 26, 1846*

“THE GLADIATOR”—MR. FORREST—ACTING

FROM footlights to lobby doors—from floor to dome—were packed crowds of people last

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## WHITMAN AS A DRAMATIC CRITIC

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night (25th) at the Park Theatre, New York, to see Mr. [Edwin] Forrest in "The Gladiator." . . . This play is as full of "Abolitionism" as an egg is of meat. It is founded on that passage of Roman history where the slaves—Gallic, Spanish, Thracian and African—rose against their masters, and formed themselves into a military organization, and for a time successfully resisted the forces sent to quell them. Running o'er with sentiments of liberty—with eloquent disclaimers of the right of the Romans to hold human beings in bondage—it is a play, this "Gladiator," calculated to make the hearts of the masses swell responsiveness to all those nobler manlier aspirations in behalf of mortal freedom!—The speech of Spartacus, in which he attributes the grandeur and wealth of Rome, to her devastation of other countries, is fine; and Mr. Forrest delivered it passing well. Indeed, in the first part of the play, this favorite actor, with his herculean proportions, was evidently i' the vein—but the later parts were not so well gone through with. . . . We do not intend the following reflections—which started dur-

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ing the view of Mr. Forrest's performances—to bear directly on that actor. Mr. F. is a deserved favorite with the public—and has high talent in his profession. But the danger is, that as he has to a measure become identified with a sort of American style of acting, the crowd of vapid imitators may spread quite all the faults of that style, with none of its excellencies. Indeed, too, in candor, all persons of thought will confess to no great fondness for acting which particularly seeks to "tickle the ears of the groundlings." We allude to the loud mouthed ranting style—the tearing of every thing to shivers—which is so much the ambition of some of our players, particularly the younger ones. It does in such cases truly seem as if some of Nature's journeymen had made men, and not made them well—they imitate humanity so abominably. They take every occasion, in season and out of season, to try the extremest strength of their lungs. They never let a part of their dialogue which falls in the imperative mood—the mood for exhorting, commanding, or permitting—pass by without the loudest exhibition of

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## WHITMAN AS A DRAMATIC CRITIC

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sound, and the most distorted gesture. If they have to enact passion, they do so by all kinds of unnatural and violent jerks, swings, screwing of the nerves of the face, rolling of the eyes, and so on. To men of taste, all this is exceedingly ridiculous. And even among the inferior portion of the audience it does not always pass safely. We have frequently seen rough boys in the pit, with an expression of sovereign contempt at performances of this sort.—For there is something in real nature which comes home to the “business and bosoms” of all men.—Who ever saw love made as it is generally made upon the stage? How often have we heard spontaneous bursts of approbation from inferior audiences, toward acting of the most unpretending kind, merely because it was simple, truthful, and natural! . . . If we thought these remarks would meet the eye of any young theatrical artist, we would like through him to beg all—for we cannot call to mind any who are not more or less tainted with this vice—to take such hints as the foregoing, to their hearts—aye, to their heart of hearts. It is a common fallacy to

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think that an exaggerated, noisy, and inflated style of acting—and no other—will produce the desired effect upon a promiscuous audience. But those who have observed things, theatres, and human nature, know better. Where is there a good, truthful player that is not appreciated? Who, during the past season, has dared compare the quiet polish of Mrs. Kean with the lofty pretensions of the general run of tragedy queens?

*April 19, 1847*

### DRAMATIC AFFAIRS, AND ACTORS

IN the heaviness that of late years seems spread, like a Lethean fog, over the prospects of a high-developed drama in this country, there is yet but little sign of the "curtain's rising." At the Park Theatre, a new piece, "Wissmuth & Company," has been produced, but it is doubtless one of those amphibious things that balk the good appetite of the times for a better drama—for an improvement on the antiquated non-pleasant method of the past. . . . Tonight, at the Park, Mrs.

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## WHITMAN AS A DRAMATIC CRITIC

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Mason [formerly Emma Wheatley] commences an engagement, playing Bianca in "Fazio"—Mr. Wheatley as the latter character. (A morbid affair, this "Fazio" play, much like the worse of Bulwer's novels.) Mrs. M. is spoken of in high terms by the critics of the New York press; but then there is really no dependence to be placed on those notices of public performers—they are half the time paid for by parties concerned, and much of the other half is the result of favoritism. . . . At the Olympic Theatre, they are giving a run, after the old sort, of the popular operas, very neatly got up on a small scale; Miss Taylor appears tonight as Zerlina in "Fra Diavolo"; (the best played parts at this theatre are Diavolo's two fellow robbers). . . . At the Bowery, Mrs. Shaw "takes" the countess in Knowles's "Love"—a good play. At the Chatham, Yankee Hill enacts his miserably exaggerated burlesque upon New England manners. . . . At the opera house in Chambers street, they are continuing the representation of a narrow few—those not even the second best—of the Italian operas; tonight, "Lucrezia Borgia."

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On Wednesday night, it will be pleasanter to go, for then they give "Lombardi." Nor must we overlook the new musical corps, late from Havana, now giving operas at the Park, two evenings a week: after the next representation by this corps, our readers will get a plain man's opinion of them.

We reiterate an idea often advanced by us before—a suggestion that some great revolution must take place here, modernizing and Americanizing the drama before it can reach that position among the first rank of intellectual entertainments, and as one of those agents of refining public manners and doing good, where it properly belongs. The same style and system of theatricals now exists that existed a hundred years ago,—while nearly every thing else is changed. What would be thought of writing novels and publishing newspapers on the plans that prevailed then? How long too shall we continue a mere inheritor of what is discarded in the Old World? For the noble specimens in all the departments of literature which England has given us—for the varied beauties of Shakspeare, the treasures of her honest sturdy old

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## WHITMAN AS A DRAMATIC CRITIC

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comedies, with their satire upon folly and vice of all kinds,—we are thankful, and would spread their influence for ever. Let them hold possession of the stage as long as may be—but not at the expense of our independence, and by making us a set of provincial imitators. It is no disrespect to those glorious old pieces and their authors to say that God's heavenly gift of genius has not been confined to them and their method of development alone. We have here in this land a new and swarming race, with an irrepressible vigor for working forward to superiority in *every thing*. As yet, it is true, all seems crude, chaotic, and unformed; but over the surface of the troubled waters, we think we see far ahead the Ararat, and the olive tree growing near. The drama *must* rise: the reign of English managers and English local plays must have its end.

*August 25, 1847*

### CONDITION OF THE STAGE

THE last *Yankee Doodle* says:

AH, HA!—A weekly paper pronounces Madame BISHOP the "greatest artist in the country," adding

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## WALT WHITMAN

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"even she may be ruined by *an ill-judged effort to coerce the press or any portion of it.*" What does all this mean? We are in America—we thought the press here was free—the press coerced by an English singer!

If the writer in *Yankee Doodle* means to intimate that he doesn't know the notorious fact that nearly all our theatres, as well as all actors of any note, have a general system of paid puffing and puffers—why that ignorance is more astonishing by far than the puffing itself! For our part, we admire Mrs. Bishop's splendid singing: it is of the highest order of art, of the florid kind. But there is very little doubt that her friends have to bow to the paying for praise system, to some extent, at any rate. . . . All the New York theatres keep a "puffer" who sends daily notices to the newspapers, which are printed in a sort of semi-editorial way; and the verdant think the notices are the spontaneous effusions of editors! Pshaw! they are paid for like advertisements! The managers say they can't get along without these puffers. Doubtless they say right.

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## WHITMAN AS A DRAMATIC CRITIC

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—As at present constituted, the theatres in this country can never seize hold of the true public appetite, or keep it. They go on the fallacious idea that “it is necessary to please the million.” Really, however, it is best to please the select few who guide, (and ought to guide,) public taste. At present, we get little but a hash of foreign pieces and foreign performers. This is not satisfactory; and without analysing their own feelings, people are getting more and more dissatisfied with it. For the drama has been, and still must be, a great element in the amusements and instructive agencies of civilized life. We think it is destined to take a new form and triple vigor, in this Republic. The time *must* come for that result. Managers, as they have been, and as they yet are, must give way to an entirely new race of managers—men of tastes fitted to the age and to the people, and to the improvements which have been effected in every other branch except the drama. That this race will come, and that soon, we have every confidence.

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## WALT WHITMAN

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*August 25, 1846*

### THE DRAMA

ONE of the New York papers openly acknowledges, (in amount) that the “shocking state” of acting and the drama, at the Park Theatre, consists in the manager’s treatment of the editor of said print! This is a very pretty admission, indeed. It is not only unfair—but, what is worse, it is silly. It is not fair; because Mr. Simpson, and the old attaches at the Park, are proverbially bland in their personal demeanor. It is silly, because the intrinsic merit or demerit of a play or a player has no more to do with the manager’s admission of “dead heads,” than with the colors of the lobby carpet.

A silly fib, has been started on its “rounds” in the papers—that Charlotte Cushman is unable to get an engagement in London—and that the manager who first engaged her lost money by paying her thirty pounds a week. This is ridiculous! C. C. is undeniably the greatest actress on the stage—and acknowledged so in London. . . . The *News* speak-

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## WHITMAN AS A DRAMATIC CRITIC

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ing of Mary Taylor, trusts that "the day is not far distant when it shall see her the leading actress at the leading theatre in the Union." With such *criticism* is it strange that the intelligent people of New York pay no attention to newspaper theatrical notices?

*October 7, 1846*

### AS A VERY AVERAGE PROOF

OF the method in which five-sixths of the Theatrical Criticism of the New York press comes into existence, may be mentioned the long cut and dried puff in yesterday's New York *Herald*, of the Keans' acting in a play *which accidentally didn't come off!* This is not the first, nor the second nor the third awkward blunder of the kind which has occurred of late.

. . . Most of the "criticisms" in the metropolitan press are written *before the plays are played*—and paid for by the theatre, or other parties. Of those which are not so paid for, the majority are the fruits of solicitation, favoritism, and so on. In the midst of all that stale and unwholesome utterance, the speak-

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## WALT WHITMAN

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ing of a single paragraph of unbiased truth falls like an alarming and terrible thing! It would be a curious result—and a profitable one—to take a while to the theatre some man, highly educated and knowing the world in other things—but totally *fresh* to the stage—and let him give his real opinions of the queer sort of doings he would see there.

*December 22, 1846*

### “IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT”

THE Brooklyn *Eagle* wishes every body in general, and some persons in particular, to understand that it considers its presence at any public place—at *any* place, where it goes in its capacity as the *B. E.*—to be a *special favor*, a thing for the place and persons visited to show themselves thankful for, and to bless their stars for. As to the “courtesy” of gratuitous tickets, little gifts, (to be noticed in the paper, which notice brings more good to them than ten times the value of said gifts,) and all that sort of thing, long custom has quite staled us to the delicious privilege. The *Eagle* will

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## WHITMAN AS A DRAMATIC CRITIC

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always like to go among its friends—will always like to be generous in the bestowal of its favors—but it must be with the clear understanding that no obligation is conferred upon it. . . . These words are said in complete good nature—and without any special application—but for “all future time.” Moreover, when the *Eagle’s* presence at a given place is wished for, it must be solicited by the polite means of special invitation, accompanied by ample “cards of admission,” etc.; it not being in the range of human possibilities or condescensions for the *E.* to explain at the doors of places that it *is* the *E.*

*January 29, 1847*

### “THE WORLD IS GOVERNED TOO MUCH.”

THE following reformation, made by General O’Donnell, at Havana, is worth copying in New York: “The public are prohibited from calling out any actor or actress, or for repetition of any piece, under penalty of fifteen days in prison.”

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WALT WHITMAN

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*August 13, 1846*

WHAT an idea! that of placing Charlotte Cushman second to Mrs. Kean, in the scale of talent in the dramatic art! Mrs. K. is a pleasing actress: but C. C. is probably the greatest performer on the stage "in any hemisphere."

## THE MUSIC LOVER

*September 8, 1847*

### A THOUGHT OF OURS ABOUT MUSIC IN THE UNITED STATES

GREAT is the power of music over a people! As for us of America, we have long enough followed obedient and child-like in the track of the Old World. We have received her tenors and her buffos, her operatic troupes and her vocalists, of all grades and complexions; listened to and applauded the songs made for a different state of society—made perhaps by royal genius, but made to please royal ears likewise; and it is time that such listening and receiving should cease. The subtlest spirit of a nation is expressed through its music—and the music acts reciprocally upon the nation's very soul.—Its effects may not be seen in a day, or a year, and yet these effects are potent invisibly. They enter into religious feelings—they tinge the manners and morals

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## WALT WHITMAN

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—they are active even in the choice of legislators and magistrates. Tariff can be varied to fit circumstances—(though we don't believe it will ever be varied again in any way but a more freetrade way,)—bad laws obliterated and good ones formed; those enactments which relate to commerce or national policy, built up or taken away, stretched or concentrated, to suit the will of the government for the time being. But no human power can thoroughly suppress the spirit which lives in national lyrics, and sounds in the favorite melodies sung by high and low.

*December 4, 1846*

### MUSIC THAT IS MUSIC

A discriminating observer of the phases of humanity—particularly its affectations—proounded through his editorial voice, the other day, a query whether nineteen twentieths of those who *appear* to be captured at the New York concerts with the florid Italian and French music, could really tell the difference, if they were blindfolded, between the playing

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## THE MUSIC LOVER

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of a tolerable amateur, and the “divine” execution of Sivori, De Meyer, and so on. We trow not! Four fifths of the enthusiasm for that sort of melody is unreal. We do not mean to say but that there *is* melody; but a man *here* might as well go into extatics at one of Cicero’s orations, in its original Roman!

We do wish the good ladies and gentlemen of America would be truer to themselves and to legitimate refinement. With all honor and glory to the land of the olive tree and the vine, fair-skied Italy—with no turning up of noses at Germany, France, or England—we humbly demand whether we have not run after their beauties long enough. For nearly every nation has its peculiarities and its idioms which make its best intellectual efforts dearest to itself alone, so that hardly any thing which comes to us in the music and songs of the Old World, is strictly good and fitting to our nation. Except, indeed, that great scope of song which pictures love, hope, or mirth, in their most general aspect.

The music of feeling—heart music as distinguished from art music—is well exemplified in such singing as the Hutchinsons’ and

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## WALT WHITMAN

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several other bands of American vocalists. With the richest physical power—with the guidance of discretion, and taste, and experience,—with the mellowing influence of discipline—it is marvellous that they do not *entirely* supplant the stale, second hand, foreign method, with its flourishes, its ridiculous sentimentality, its anti-republican spirit, and its sycophantic tainting the young taste of the nation! We allude to, and specially commend, all this school of singing—well exemplified as its beauty is in those “bands of brothers,” whereof we have several now before the American public. Because whatever touches the heart is better than what is merely addressed to the ear. Elegant simplicity in manner is more judicious than the dancing school bows and curtsies, and inane smiles, and kissing of the tips of a kid glove à la Pico. Songs whose words you can hear and understand are preferable to a mass of unintelligible stuff, (for who makes out even the libretto of English opera, as now given on the stage?) which for all the sense you get out of it, might as well be Arabic. Sensible sweetness is better

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## THE MUSIC LOVER

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than all distorted by unnatural nonsense. . . . Such hints as the above, however, we throw out rather as suggestive of a train of thought to other and more deliberate thinkers than we—and not as the criticisms of a musical connoisseur. If they have pith in them, well; if not, we at least know they are written in that true wish for benefitting the subject spoken of, which should characterize all such essays. We are absolutely sick to nausea of the patent-leather, curled hair, "japonicadom" style.—The *real* (not "artistes" but) singers are as much ahead of it as good real teeth are ahead of artificial ones. The sight of them, as they are, puts one in mind of health and fresh air in the country, at sunrise—the dewy, earthy fragrance that comes up then in the moisture, and touches the nostrils more gratefully than all the perfumes of the most ingenious chemist.

*March 23, 1847*

### "THE BARBER OF SEVILLE"

As performed by the present Italian opera company in New York does not appear to be

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## WALT WHITMAN

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at all to the taste of our best judging musicians—probably on account of the inefficient manner in which some of the characters are sustained. One good exchange could certainly be made, if Bebedetti would take the part Signor Patti at present fills; it would gratify all, and probably ensure a second attendance. Beneventano as the barber does very well—better than might be expected from one with so heavy a voice and manner. His opening song is the gem of the performance, and is given with ease and spirit; moreover, his voice improves on acquaintance, and when singing in chorus, comes in like some high toned instrument filling out and sustaining the different parts. Although this production of Rossini's is familiar, it is nevertheless always heard with pleasure: the instrumentation is beautiful, and has that clean, though rather old fashioned character, in which his delicate ideas produce effect, and not any overpowering crash of instruments. Sanquirico, as usual, is full of fun, and submits to the shaving operation to the infinite gratification of all concerned, while Pico does every thing in her

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## THE MUSIC LOVER

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own attractive manner so that one could easily sympathize with her guardian in his chagrin at her loss.

*August 5, 1847*

### MRS. BISHOP'S SINGING

[Ann Riviere, also known as Madame Anna Bishop, a noted soprano, 1814-1884.]

THE appearance of Mrs. Bishop—which we strolled over to the Park Theatre last evening to see, or rather hear—was greeted by one of the most inspiriting houses that ever assembled in those old walls! We found a seat, after considerable looking for it, in one of the tiers that was neither first, second, nor fourth; but as we had that sage grave man, Major Noah, by our side, and divers other of the city editors, we thought it would do. . . . Mrs. Bishop, in look, is an Englishwoman, considerably Italianized; she is of middling size, or a trifle more, has bright dark eyes, and superb figure and general physical build. Her voice is the purest soprano—and of as silvery

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## WALT WHITMAN

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clearness as ever came from the human throat—rich, but not massive—and of such flexibility that one is almost appalled at the way the most difficult passages are not only gone over with ease, but actually dallied with, and their difficulty redoubled. They put one in mind of the gyrations of a bird in the air. . . . The heat and the crowd prevented our staying to see more than the first act. The piece was “Linda of Chamouni,” the English adaptation of course. Mrs. B. herself, however, sings with equal facility in French, Italian, or German. Probably her immense vocal fluency gives her an easy command of any language.

*October 9, 1846*

### MR. BURKE, THE VIOLINIST

THE capricious marvels of Ernst’s “edition” of “The Carnival of Venice” were surely never given with more surpassing brilliance than last night, by Mr. Burke, the violinist, at De Meyer’s concert in the New York Tabernacle. After having often heard Ole Bull’s performance of the same prodigious musical

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## THE MUSIC LOVER

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climax, (in the way of difficulty) we do not hesitate to say that Mr. Burke is up to any artist of the age—if not ahead of any. It seems, indeed, quite impossible for greater power, variety, and expression to be drawn from the violin, with greater dexterity, smoothness, and as occasion demands lightning-like quickness—than Mr. B. evinced last evening. We know nothing, and wish to know nothing, of the wrangles of cliques, etc., in the musical circles of New York: we only know that Mr. Burke possesses the highest genius—and that is quite enough to know, in our allusions to him as an artist. That he is an adopted American citizen is none the less a merit to us—though whatever his country, the gifts where-with God has endowed him, give him a claim on the good will of every heart to which God has also given an appreciation of the beautiful.

*November 9, 1847*

### ORATORIO OF "ELIJAH"

WE went over to hear the oratorio of "Elijah" last evening at the Tabernacle, New

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## WALT WHITMAN

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York. Although the music, judged by the rules of the art, is of the highest order, it is too elaborately scientific for the popular ear. It is, besides, too heavy in its general character, and wants the relief of a proper proportion of lightness and melody. There is scarcely a striking or pleasing air in it. To a mere musician, however, it would afford study and delight for a year. Some of the choruses are characterized by all the grandeur and sublimity of the best of Handel's productions, but these do not compensate for defects in other respects. Although the audience, which was large, sat out the performance, it was evident that no great degree of pleasure was derived from it.

*October 13, 1846*

### THE NEW VIOLINIST

WE went over to the New York Tabernacle last night, (12th) to hear Camillo Sivori's concert. The man is a true artist: he deserves a niche near Burke, Vieuxtemps, and Ole Bull; he has a fully equal portion with them of the

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## THE MUSIC LOVER

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ethereal fire! . . . His execution on a single string of Paganini's "La Preghiera di Mose," (The Prayer of Moses) went through the house like a miracle—and the Martial Theme into which it merges at the end made one's heart dance under one's ribs. We welcome this man among us;—for heavenly genius belongs to no country, and we scorn the common cant which would sneer at such genius' highest development, merely because its birth-place was in a distant land! We scorn to join in the ready cry of "humbug" at such a man as Sivori—merely because he speaks broken English, and has ascended in his profession to that "height of the great argument," for which the vulgar taste has no appreciation! . . . Miss Moss sang well last night—and the band behaved gloriously.

*December 16, 1846*

### DON'T BE SO "MORTAL GENTEEL!"

IF we may presume on such a liberty, we would say a word to Brooklyn audiences at public concerts, etc. How strangely stiff and

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## WALT WHITMAN

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formal they are! How chary of their applause! Or rather how chary of their hands—for one's brain does not soon get over that jarring discord produced by kicking and stamping with heavy boots and thumping with canes! Let us whisper in their ears, that kicks are poor tokens of kindness, and no thorough bred person now-a-days, ever expresses approbation with his *feet*. Your *hands*—give your hands, ladies and gentlemen, where your hearts prompt you to give anything.—And during the intervals of the performance be not afraid of talking, laughing and moving.—You are not having daguerreotypes taken, not acting silent statues—and it comes over one like a chill to see so many persons perched, as it were, on their propriety, and every word in a low whisper.

*January 4, 1847*

### TRUE YANKEE TALENT.—A WORD ABOUT FOSTERING PRECOCITY IN CHILDREN

IF the American public do not eventually appreciate, *in full*, the superb performances

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## THE MUSIC LOVER

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of Apollonean children, (whose last concert is held to-morrow evening,) said public will be blinder even than certain foreign tourists have accused them of being, to the beautiful and the refined. There is no doubt that these children are among the most talented musicians of the age—and that, too, at a period when most youths are learning the rules of grammar and that famous “Tare and Fret” which is averred to make the juvenile student “sweat.” . . . The Brooklyn *Eagle* is so well pleased with these divine little creatures that it takes the liberty of enjoining on their guardians—(for they are evidently among those “whom the gods love”: but Oh! we hope they will not carry out the old proverb!) —it takes the liberty of deprecating *too much mental exercise*, for them.—They are too valuable to be martyred! Let them have plenty of *out-door* exercise—active physical recreation and employment. As the B. E. has gazed in the fine face, the large prematurely angelic and full eyes of the girl—the sweet, fair haired one! it has trembled to think—on what it thought. . . . Surely it is hardly needful

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## WALT WHITMAN

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to add that these lines are written from the truest kindness.

*September 19, 1846*

### VOCAL CONCERTS, BY CHILDREN

WE like these children's concerts, that are becoming popular of late, and would encourage their frequent repetition. To spread a capacity and fondness for music among the masses, were to refine and polish them in the truest sense. Indeed, we think there is a *real national taste* for the "concord of sweet sounds," in America, equal intrinsically to that which has long marked the land of sunny skies. Of course it is yet crude and uncultivated, but the soul of it is there, and only needs due fostering to be brought out. . . . It were well if music were made a regular branch of study in all our common schools. The meliorating influence of such a practice on the minds and habits of youth is beyond dispute—and indeed, with the exception of New York, nearly all the schools of the land do sing.

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## THE MUSIC LOVER

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*December 23, 1846*

### ALTRUISM

A church in Tenth street, Philadelphia, lately dismissed a celebrated vocalist—a widow with two children—because her name appeared on a concert bill!

*March 20, 1847*

Since “all the papers” are giving testimony in reference to the way in which the Italian opera at Palmo’s treats the press, B. E. thinks proper to bear witness to their uniform courtesy and blandness toward *his* folks.

*March 13, 1847*

Our New York contemporary the *Globe*, in speaking of the singers Hutchinsons “suspects they are rather Whiggish in their politics.” We happen to *know* that this is not the case. The H.’s. are true sons of the Old Granite State; they are Democrats.

## COMMENT ON ART

*October 21, 1846*

### FREE EXHIBITIONS OF WORKS OF ART

WE have often wished that the severe economy of our forms of government in this country were susceptible of being stretched in such a way as to make them aid the free exhibition of works of art—painting, statuary, etc. We think the happiest effects might be expected from such a course. For the influence of beautiful works of art pervades the minds, and in due time the actions and character, of all who come in contact with them. What, for instance, might not be anticipated from the invisible spirit emanating from the perpetual presence of such great and beautiful works as are now met with at Florence, at Rome, and in Paris? What from such a thing as that immortal spire of the Antwerp Cathedral? What from the divine architecture of the world-famed church at Rome? And all public ex-

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## COMMENT ON ART

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hibitions of paintings, statuary, etc., diffuse more or less of the refinement and spiritual elegance, which are identified with art. . . . We have been led into such thought as this, by noticing in the New York prints an announcement, this morning (21st) that the Gallery of Statues belonging to the National Academy, corner of Broadway and Leonard streets, has been opened to the public for a few days, free of charge. We wish that such liberality were a more frequent thing in this section. We would that the National Academy were so endowed that they could make their exhibitions perpetually free. Is there no hope of a consummation so much to be wished for?

*July 22, 1846*

### THAT INDIAN GALLERY

OF Catlin's—which he made and gathered with such infinite trouble—is now at the Louvre at Paris! More than forty of our Indian Tribes are represented in this collection; and the extraordinary genius and enthusiasm of Mr. Catlin impelled him, in

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## WALT WHITMAN

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defiance of difficulties, and at the peril of his life, to devote eight years among the bold and intractable aborigines of the West, to secure faithful and spirited representations of their persons, costumes, manners, ceremonies, and scenes in which they live. His chief ambition now is to see his works protected by the government, and to enlarge and complete them, in memory of a powerful race, who once owned the soil we cultivate, in honor to his country, and to the art that he has cultivated with eminent success.

Our accomplished artist, Mr. Healy, speaks of the pictures of Mr. Catlin as a "precious collection"; general opinion appears to be strongly in favor of their purchase by Congress, and no little regret will be felt, should the offer of Mr. Catlin fail to be accepted at the present session. Indeed, from what we learn of Mr. Catlin's views, (and especially that he has been unfortunate, by no fault of his, in bringing out his late splendid work,) and that he is urged by liberal proposals to fix his collection in England, we fear unless the Government acts promptly, we shall never

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## COMMENT ON ART

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again have the opportunity of restoring to our country these paintings and memorials, so emphatically American, and of such decided importance to Art and to our national History.

*November 21, 1846*

### ABOUT PICTURES, ETC.

WE went into the Institute rooms in Washington street, yesterday afternoon, (20th) to take "a last fond look" at the pictures—(which we blame ourselves much for not having noticed more fully before). If we may flatter ourselves that our readers remember any length of time what sentiments we advanced in these columns, they must be aware that we "go" partly for all the rational refinements and rose colorings of life—such as music, mirth, works of art, genial kindness, and so forth. We wish every mechanic and laboring man and woman of Brooklyn, would have *some* such adornment to his or her abode—however humble that abode may be—a print hung on the wall, a pot of flowers or even the occasional noise of an accordeon, (an instru-

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## WALT WHITMAN

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ment, by the way, which discourses very eloquent, well-played, and is cheap to buy, and easy learned: We advise our excellent friend Mr. Hjousberry to get an invoice of cheap ones, and put them in tune for humble purchasers, the coming season). . . . And if we are met with a ready rejoinder, that "it is hard enough for poor folks to earn the necessities of life, let alone things which they can neither eat nor wear," we still say that the higher appetite, the appetite for beauty and the intellectual, must be consulted, too, and the bread and beef should not always be allowed to carry the day. "He that hath two loaves," says Jean Paul, "let him go and exchange one for some flowers; for bread is food for the body, and flowers are food for the mind."

Among several very fair paintings at the Institute, we yesterday noticed with satisfaction the "Portrait of a Gentleman," No. 19—"Portrait of a Child," No. 31,—the "Kitchen Ball at White Sulphur Springs;" Mr. Fisher's "Portrait of a Lady," and Mr. Roger's two "Landscapes." Doubtlessly there were others

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## COMMENT ON ART

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worthy of particular commendation, but our limited time, (many had been taken away, too, as the Exhibition closes today) prevented our making a fuller examination. . . . The old "Snow Scene, Brooklyn Thirty Years Ago"—a regular "feature" in these exhibitions—stood out in as bold relief as ever; and we paid due respect to it. Perhaps few things will be able to bring before the eyes and realization of the next race, the fact how rapidly Brooklyn has "went" in the progress of improvement, more fully than this well delineated picture.

We commend these exhibitions—and hope the spirit which prompts them will increase and multiply in Brooklyn. We wish some plan could be formed which would result in the perpetual *free* exhibition of works of art here, which would be open to all classes.



## Part VII

### TWO SHORT STORIES

[*Not Included in Whitman's Published Works*]



*August 18, 1846*

## THE LOVE OF ERIS: A SPIRIT RECORD

By Walter Whitman

WHO says there are not angels or invisible spirits watching around us? O! the teeming regions of the air swarm with many a bodiless ghost—bodiless in human sight, because of their exceeding and too dazzling beauty!

And there is one, childlike, with helpless and unsteady movements, but a countenance of immortal bloom, whose long-lashed eyes droop downward.—The name of the shape is Dai. When he comes near, the angels are silent, and gaze upon him with pity and affection. And the fair eyes of the shape roll, but fix upon no object; while his lips move, but a plaintive tone only is heard, the speaking a single name. Wandering in the confines of earth, or restlessly amid the streets of the Beautiful Land goes Dai, earnestly calling on one he loves.

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## WALT WHITMAN

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Wherefore is there no response?

Soft as the feathery leaf of the frailest flower—pure as the heart of flame—of a beauty so lustrous that the Sons of Heaven themselves might well be drunken to gaze thereon—with fleecy robes that but half apparel a maddening whiteness and grace—dwells Eris among the Creatures Beautiful, a chosen and cherished one. And Eris is the name called by the wandering angel,—while no answer comes, and the loved flies swiftly away, with a look of sadness and displeasure.

It had been years before that a maid and her betrothed lived in one of the pleasant places of earth. Their hearts clung to each other with the fondness of young life, and all its dreamy passion. Each was simple and innocent. Mortality might not know a thing better than their love, or more sunny than their happiness.

In the method of the rule of fate, it was ordered that the maid should sicken and be drawn nigh to the gates of death—nigh, but not through them.—Now to the young who love purely, High Power commissions to each

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## THE LOVE OF ERIS

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a gentle guardian, who hovers around unseen day and night. The office of this spirit is to keep a sleepless watch, and fill the heart of his charge with strange and mysterious and lovely thoughts. Over the maid was placed Dai, and through her illness the unknown presence of the youth hung near continually.

Erewhile, a cloud was seen in Heaven. An archangel with veiled cheeks cleaved the air. Silence spread through the hosts of the Passed Away, who gazed in wonder and fear. And as they gazed, they saw a new companion of wondrous loveliness among them—a strange and timid creature, who, were it not that pain must never enter those borders with innocence, would have been called unhappy. The angels gathered around the late comer with caresses and kisses, and they smiled pleasantly with joy in each other's eyes.

Then the archangel's voice was heard and they who heard it knew that One still mightier spake his will therein:

“The child Dai!” said he.

A far reply sounded out in tones of trembling and apprehension.

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## WALT WHITMAN

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“I am here!”

And the youth came forth from the distant confines, whither he had been in solitude. The placid look of peace no more illumined his brow: and his unearthly beauty was as a choice statue shrouded in smoke.

“Oh, weak and wicked spirit!” said the archangel, “thou hast been false to thy mission, and thy Master!”

The quivering limbs of Dai, felt weak and cold.—He would have made an answer in agony—but now he lifted his eyes and beheld the countenance of Eris, the late comer.

Love is potent, even in Heaven! And subtle passion creeps into the hearts of the Sons of Beauty, who feel the delicious impulse, and know that there is a soft sadness sweeter than aught in the round of their pleasure eternal.

When the youth saw Eris, he sprang forward with lightning swiftness to her side. But the late comer turned away with aversion. The band of good will might not be between them, because of wrongs done, and the planting of despair in two happy human hearts.

At the same moment, the myriads of inter-

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## THE LOVE OF ERIS

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linked spirits that range step by step from the throne of the Uppermost (as the power of that light and presence which are unbearable even to the deathless, must be tempered for the sight of any created thing, however lofty,) were conscious of a motion of the mind of God. Quicker than electric thought, the command was accomplished! The disobedient angel felt himself enveloped in a sudden cloud, impenetrably dark. The face of Eris gladdened and maddened him no more. He turned himself to and fro, and stretched out his arms—but though he knew the nearness of his companions, the light of Heaven, and of the eyes of Eris, was strangely sealed to him. Dai was blind forever.

So a wandering angel sweeps through space, with restless and unsteady movements,—and the sound heard from his lips is the calling of a single name.—But the loved flies swiftly away in sadness, and heeds him not. Onward and onward speeds the angel, amid scenes of ineffable splendor, though to his sight the splendor is darkness. But there is one scene that rests before him alway. It is of a low

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WALT WHITMAN

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brown dwelling among the children of men; and in an inner room a couch, whereon lies a young maid, whose cheeks rival the frailness and paleness of foam. Near by is a youth; and the filmy eyes of the girl are bent upon him in fondness. What dim shape hovers overhead? He is invisible to mortals; but oh! well may the blind spirit, by the token of throbs of guilty and fiery love, beating through him, know that hovering form! Thrust forward by such fiery love, the shape dared transcend his duty. Again the youth looked upon the couch and beheld a lifeless corpse.

This is the picture upon the vision of Dai. His brethren of the Bands of Light, as they meet him in his journeyings, pause awhile for pity; yet never do the pangs of their sympathy, the only pangs known to those sinless creatures, or arms thrown softly around him, or kisses on his brow, efface the pale lineaments of the sick girl—the dead.

In the portals of Heaven stands Eris, oft peering into the outer distance. Nor of the million of winged messengers that hourly come and go, does one enter there whose features

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## THE LOVE OF ERIS

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are not earnestly scanned by the watcher. And the fond joy resides in her soul, that the time is nigh at hand; for a thread yet binds the angel down to the old abode, and until the breaking of that bond, Eris keeps vigil in the portals of Heaven.

The limit of the watch comes soon. On earth, a toil-worn man has returned from distant travel, and lays him down, weary and faint at heart, on a floor amid the ruins of the low brown dwelling.—The slight echo is heard of moans coming from the breast of one who yearns to die. Life, and rosy light, and the pleasant things of nature, and the voice and sight of his fellows, and the glory of thought—the sun, the flowers, the glittering stars, the soft breeze—have no joy for him. And the coffin and the cold earth have no horror; they are a path to the unforgotten.

Thus the tale is told in Heaven, how the pure love of two human beings is a sacred thing, which the immortal themselves must not dare to cross.—In pity to the disobedient angel, he is blind, that he may not gaze ceaselessly on one who returns his love with dis-

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WALT WHITMAN

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pleasure. And haply Dai is the spirit of the destiny of those whose selfishness would seek to mar the peace of gentle hearts, by their own intrusive and unhallowed passion.

*June 11, 1846*

## A LEGEND OF LIFE AND LOVE

By Walter Whitman

UPON the banks of a pleasant river once stood a cottage, the residence of an ancient man, whose limbs were feeble with the weight of years, and of former sorrow. In his appetite easily gratified, like the simple race of the people among whom he lived, every want was supplied by a few fertile acres. Those acres were tilled and tended by two brothers, grandsons of the old man, and dwellers also in the cottage. The parents of the boys lay buried in a tomb nearby.

Nathan, the eldest, had hardly seen his twentieth summer. He was a beautiful youth. Glossy hair clustered upon his head, and his cheeks were very brown from sunshine and air. Though the eyes of Nathan were soft and liquid, like a girl's, and his lips curled with a voluptuous swell, exercise and labor had de-

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## WALT WHITMAN

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veloped his limbs into noble and manly proportions. The bands of hunters as they met sometimes to start off together after game upon the neighboring hills, could hardly show one among their number who in comeliness, strength or activity, might compete with the youthful Nathan.

Mark was but a year younger than his brother. He, too, had great beauty.

In the course of time the ancient sickened and knew that he was to die. Before the approach of the fatal hour he called before him the two youths, and addressed them thus:

“The world, my children, is full of deceit. Evil men swarm in every place, and sorrow and disappointment are the fruits of intercourse with them. So wisdom is wary.

“And as the things of life are only shadows, passing like the darkness of a cloud, twine no bands of love about your hearts. For love is the ficklest of the things of life. The object of our affection dies, and we henceforth languish in agony, or perhaps the love we covet dies and that is more painful yet.

“It is well never to confide in any man. It

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## A LEGEND OF LIFE AND LOVE

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is well to keep aloof from the follies and impurities of earth. Let there be no link between you and others. Let not any being control you through your dependence upon him for a portion of your happiness. This, my sons, I have learned by bitter experience, is a teaching of truth."

Within a few days afterward the old man was placed away in the marble tomb of his kindred, which was built on a hill by the shore.

Now the injunctions given to Nathan and his brother—the injunctions frequently impressed upon them by the same monitorial voice—were pondered over by each youth in his inmost heart. They had always habitually respected their grandsire; whatever came from his mouth, therefore, seemed as the words of an oracle, not to be gainsayed.

Soon the path of Nathan chanced to be sundered from that of Mark. And the trees leaved out, and then in autumn cast their foliage and in due course leaved out again, and many times again—and the brothers met not yet.

Two-score years and ten. What changes

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## WALT WHITMAN

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worked over earth in such a space of two-score years and ten.

As the sun an hour ere his setting cast long, slanting shadows to the eastward, two men, withered and with hair thin and snowy, came wearily up from opposite directions and stood together at a tomb built on a hill by the borders of a fair river. Why do they start, as each cast his dim eyes toward the face of the other? Why do tears drop down their cheeks and their forms tremble even more than with the feebleness of age? They are the long separated brethren and they enfold themselves in one another's arms.

"And yet," said Mark after a few moments, stepping back and gazing earnestly upon his companion's form and figure, "and yet it wonders me that thou art my brother. There should be a brave and beautiful youth, with black curls upon his head, and not those pale emblems of decay. And my brother should be straight and nimble—not bent and tottering as thou."

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## A LEGEND OF LIFE AND LOVE

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The speaker cast a second searching glance, a glance of discontent.

"And I," rejoined Nathan, "I might require from my brother not such shrivelled limbs as I see, and instead of that cracked voice the full swelling music of a morning heart—but that half a century it is, dear brother, since my gaze rested upon thy face."

Mark sighed and answered not.

Then, in a little while they made inquiries of what had befallen either during the time past. Seated upon the marble by which they had met, Mark briefly told his story.

"I bethink me, brother, many, many years have indeed passed over since the sorrowful day when our grandsire, dying, left us to seek our fortunes amid a wicked and seductive world.

"His last words, as thou doubtless remember, advised us against the snares that should beset our subsequent journeys. He portrayed the dangers which lie in the path of love; he impressed upon our minds the folly of placing confidence in human honor; and warned us to keep aloof from too close communion with

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## WALT WHITMAN

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our kind. He then died, but his instructions lived and have ever been present in my memory.

"Dear Nathan, why should I conceal from you that at that time I loved? My simple soul, unfitted with the wisdom of our aged relative, had yielded to the delicious folly, and the brown-eyed Eva was my young heart's choice. Oh, brother, even now, the feeble and withered thing I am, dim recollections, pleasant passages come forth around me, like the joy of old dreams. A boy again, and in the confiding heart of a boy I walk with Eva by the river's bank. And the gentle creature blushes at my protestations of love, and leans her cheek upon my neck. The regal sun goes down in the West, we gaze upon the glory of the clouds that attend his setting, and while we look at their fantastic changes a laugh sounds clear like a flute and merry as the jingling of silver bells. It is the laugh of Eva."

The eye of the old man glistened with unwonted brightness. He paused, sighed, the brightness faded away, and he went on with his narration:

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## A LEGEND OF LIFE AND LOVE

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"As I said, the dying lessons of him whom we reverenced were treasured in my soul. I could not but feel their truth. I feared if I again stood beside the maiden of my love, and looked upon her face, and listened to her words, the wholesome axioms might be blotted from my thought. So I determined to act as became a man; from that hour I never have beheld the brown eyes of Eva.

"I went amidst the world, acting upon the wise principles which our aged friend taught us. I looked upon everything with suspicious eyes. Alas, I found it but too true that iniquity and deceit are the ruling spirits of men.

"Some called me cold, calculating and unamiable, but it was their own unworthiness that made me appear so to their eyes. I am not—you know, my brother—I am not naturally of proud and repulsive manner; but I was determined never to give my friendship merely to be blown off again, as it might by chance, as a feather by the wind nor interweave my course of life with those that very likely would draw all the advantage of the connection and leave me no better than before.

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## WALT WHITMAN

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“I engaged in traffic. Success attended me. Enemies said that my good fortune was the result of chance, but I knew it the fruit of the judicious system of caution which governed me in matters of business as well as in social intercourse.

“My brother, thus have I lived my life. Your look asks me if I have been happy. Dear brother, truth impels me to say no. Yet assuredly, if few glittering pleasures ministered to me on my journey, equally few were disappointments, the hopes blighted, the trusts betrayed, the faintings of soul, caused by the dereliction of those in whom I had laid up treasures.

“Ah, my brother, the world is full of misery.”

The disciple of wretched faith ceased his story, and there was silence awhile.

Then Nathan spake:

“In the early years,” he said, “I, too, loved a beautiful woman. Whether my heart was more frail than thine, or affection had gained a mightier power over me, I could not part from her I loved without the satisfaction of a

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## A LEGEND OF LIFE AND LOVE

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farewell kiss. We met—I had resolved to stay but for a moment—for I had laid out my future life after the fashion thou hast described thine.

“How it was I know not, but the moments rolled on to hours and still we stood with our arms around each other.

“My brother, a maiden’s tears washed my stern resolves away. The lure of a voice rolling quietly from between two soft lips enticed me from remembrance of my grandsire’s wisdom. I forgot his teachings and married the woman I loved.

“Ah, how sweetly sped the season. We were blessed. True, there came crossings when evils threatened, but we withstood them all, and holding each other by the hand forgot that such a thing as sorrow remained in the world.

“Children were born to us—brave boys and fair girls. Oh mark that swelling of tenderness for our offspring which the rigorous doctrines of your course of life have withheld from me.

“Like you, I engaged in trade. Various fortunes followed my path. I will not deny

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## WALT WHITMAN

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that some in whom I thought virtue was strong proved cunning hypocrites and worthy of no man's trust. Yet are there many I have known spotless as far as humanity may be spotless.

"Thus, to me, life has been alternately dark and fair. Have I lived happy? No, not completely. It is never for mortals to be so. But I can lay my hand upon my heart and thank the Great Master that the sunshine has been far oftener than the darkness of the clouds.

"Dear brother, the world has misery—but it is a pleasant world still, and affords much joy to the dwellers."

'As Nathan ceased, his brother looked up into his face like a man unto whom a simple truth had been for the first time revealed.

— "I've written things  
as bad as this; why  
**THE END** can't I write some  
as good as Walt's  
masterpieces?

George Whitman  
Feb 1941

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